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British Birds Volume 91 (1998) Main contents

JANUARY-FEBRUARY

2 The British List: new categories and their relevance to conservation *John Holmes, John Marchant, Neil Bucknell, David Stroud & Prof. David T. Parkin*

12 Field identification of large falcons in the West Palearctic *Hadoram Shirihai, Dick Forsman & David A. Christie; illustrated by John Gale*

38 European news

MARCH

77 Cetti's Warblers in the United Kingdom and the Channel Islands in 1996 *Simon Wotton, Dr David W. Gibbons, Michael Dilger & Philip V. Grice*

93 Dowitcher identification and ageing: a photographic review *Dr R. J. Chandler*

APRIL

124 Studies of West Palearctic birds *197* Tree Sparrow *Dr J. Denis Summers-Smith*

149 Redhead in Nottinghamshire: new to Britain and Ireland *M. C. Dennis*

155 Obituary: Colin Tubbs (1937-1997) *Norman Pratt & Eddie Wiseman*

MAY

165 Hybridisation between Lesser Crested and Sandwich Terns in Valencia, Spain, and plumage of offspring *J. Ignacio Dies & Bosco Dies*

171 Golden and White-tailed Eagles in Scotland and Norway *Dr D. J. Halley*

180 A report of Long-toed Stint on South Uist *Dr Colin Bradshaw & Peter G. Lansdown*

185 The Best Annual Bird Report Awards *Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, Robert Gillmor, R. A. Hume, Derek Moore & Michael J. Rogers*

JUNE

209 Editorial

210 Breeding Marsh Harriers in the United Kingdom, 1983-95 *Dr John Underhill-Day*

219 Bird Photograph of the Year *Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, Dr R. J. Chandler, Robin Chittenden, David Hosking & Don Smith*

225 Spectacled Warbler in North Yorkshire: new to Britain and Ireland *Craig C. Thomas, Richard E. Harbird & Peter J. Dunn*

241 European news

JULY

263 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' and 'The Richard Richardson Award' *Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, Robert Gillmor, Alan Harris, Bruce Pearson & Keith Shackleton*

269 Obituary: Clive Desmond Hutchinson BA (1949-1998) *Dr John O'Halloran & Dr J. T. R. Sharrock*

273 The Little Egret in Britain: a successful colonist *Leigh Lock & Kevin Cook*

AUGUST

307 Predictions of the effects of global climate change on Britain's birds *Stephen Moss*

336 Ruddy Ducks breeding in the United Kingdom in 1994 *Dr Baz Hughes, Mark Underhill & Simon Delany*

SEPTEMBER

361 Taxonomy and identification of chiffchaffs in the Western Palearctic *Peter Clement & Dr Andreas J. Helbig; illustrated by Brian Small*

386 Sabine's Gulls in western France and southern Britain *Norman Elkins & Pierre Yésou*

OCTOBER

403 Editorial

404 The Best Bird Book of the Year

406 The Carl Zeiss Award *R. A. Hume & Dr J. T. R. Sharrock*

409 Resurgence of Egyptian Vultures in western Pyrénées, and relationship with Griffon Vultures *Jacques Carlon*

417 Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 1995 *Dr Malcolm Ogilvie & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel*

NOVEMBER

455 Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 1997 *Michael J. Rogers & the BBRC*

DECEMBER

523 Young Ornithologists of the Year *Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, Rob Hume, B. A. E. Marr, Dr J. J. D. Greenwood, Robert Gillmor & Peter Holden*

538 The ornithological year 1996 *Barry Nightingale & Keith Allsopp*

549 All-dark petrels in the North Atlantic *Stephen Morrison*

565 Status of Brent Goose in northwest Yakutia, East Siberia *E. E. Syroechkovski, C. Zöckler & E. Lappo*

WINNER, BIRD ILLUSTRATOR OF THE YEAR 1998 (see pages 263-268): Great Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula*, displaying, Newton-by-the-Sea, Northumberland, December 1997 (*Paul Henery*)

ISSN 0007-0335

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Volume 91 Numbers 1-2 January-February 1998

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Camera adaptor 800mm 159
Stay-on case 55

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20-60x (B) zoom eyepiece 209
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Photo adaptor 239
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Skua case 64
TSN-1 (45°) or -2 body 289
TSN-3 (45°) or -4 body 589
25x or 40x eyepiece 89
20x (WA) eyepiece 129
30x (WA) eyepiece 159
60x eyepiece 138
77x eyepiece 125
20-60x zoom eyepiece 185
Camera adaptor 800mm 150
Skua case 54
27x (WA) Screw-in-eyepiece 74
TS-611 body (45°) 239
TS-612 body 219
TS-613 Fluorite body (45°) 499
TS-614 Fluorite body 499
TS-610 accessories:
20x (WA) eyepiece 79
27x (WA) eyepiece 109
20-60x zoom eyepiece 127
Skua case 54

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30x (WW) eye piece –
with scope 159

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OPTICRON
8 x 42 Imagic 149
10 x 42 Imagic 159
8 x 32 Dioptron 167
8 x 42 Dioptron 169
10 x 42 Dioptron 179
10 x 50 Dioptron 199
8 x 32 (HRII) 197
8 x 42 (HRII) 199
10 x 42 (HRII) 209
10 x 50 (HRII) 229
12½ x 50 (HRII) 239
7 x 42 (HRII) 198
7x24, 8x24 or 10x24 MCF 125
Roof prism binos (new):
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HR 66 scope 279
HR 66 (45°) 319
15x, 20x, 25x or 40x HR eyepiece 44
20x WW HDF eyepiece 96
28x WW HDF eyepiece 119
22x W HR eyepiece 57
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60x HR eyepiece 49
20-60x zoom eyepiece 119

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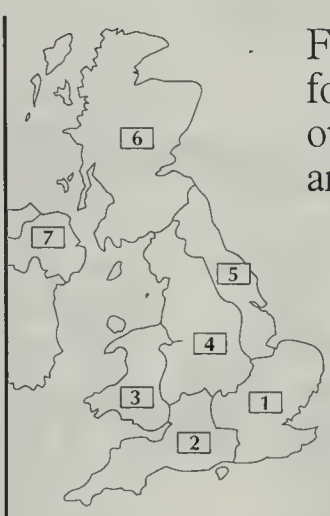

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EDITORIAL

After 26 years as a member of the Editorial Board of *British Birds*, Dr Malcolm Ogilvie has decided that it is time to reduce, though not sever entirely, his involvement with the journal. Although editorial meetings are held only three or four times a year, he has found attending such meetings in London increasingly tedious and, bearing in mind that he lives on the Isle of Islay, who shall blame him? He has agreed to continue as an editorial adviser, so that we do not entirely lose his considerable experience, and also as a member of the Behaviour Notes Panel and as compiler of the annual index, but has left the Editorial Board.

This creates a vacancy which the remaining editors wish to fill. In the past, editors have been appointed through what can only be termed the 'old birdwatcher network'. In order to fall into line with more up-to-date practice and, in particular, because the editors are all in their 50s and are looking for someone younger than themselves, who can bring new ideas which will help to take the journal into the next century, it has been decided to request applications for the position on the Editorial Board. It brings no remuneration, though expenses are covered, but does produce, as all the present and past editors will confirm, an immense sense of satisfaction with being closely involved in ensuring the continuing high quality and standards that *British Birds* has always striven to maintain. If you feel that you have a broad ornithological knowledge, an ability to assess, constructively, the writings of other ornithologists, mainly amateur, and an enthusiasm for *British Birds*, then please write to Tim Sharrock with relevant details about yourself and explaining why you would like to become a member of the Editorial Board. The person appointed will, incidentally, be only the twenty-first member in the 90-year span of the journal.

Combined January-February issue

We are constantly attempting to maintain and improve the standard of the contents of *BB* and keep the subscription level low, against a background of increasing overheads and rising costs of both materials and services.

Last year, we experimented by combining the January and February issues (thereby saving one-twelfth of the cost of postage, packing and covers, but losing one month's advertising revenue). These two issues are usually despatched only 14 days apart (in early and late January), so despatch of the single extra-large issue was in mid January.

We monitored readers' reactions to this experiment, not only by noting unsolicited comments, but also by sounding out a sample of subscribers. We found that most people—faced with the alternative of a reduction in the number of pages (or a rise in subscription price)—preferred to have a large combined issue.

We have, therefore, opted to take the same action this year, which again gives us the opportunity to have variety within the issue despite including long papers. We give prior warning that we may adopt this stratagem again if, by so doing, we feel that we are giving subscribers better value for money. We hope very much that all readers will understand and support us in this action.

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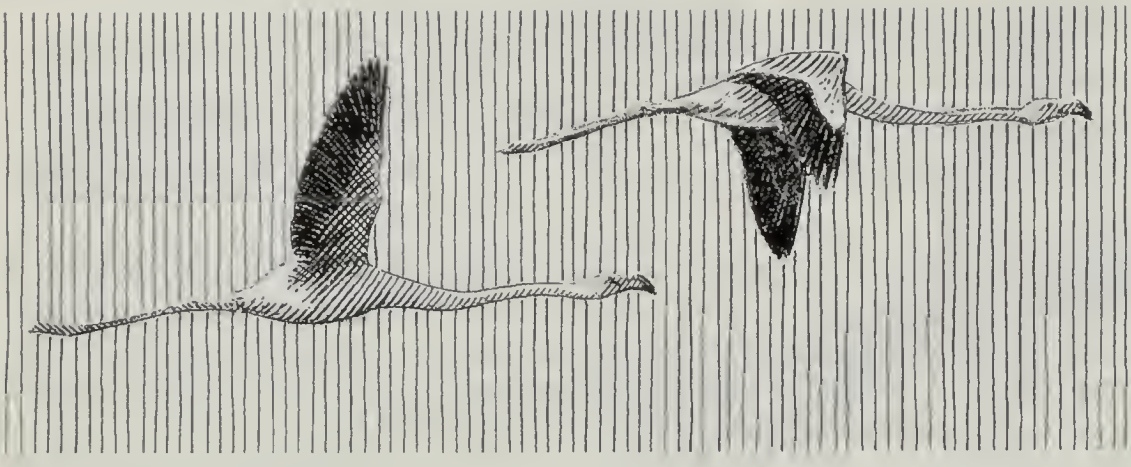

The British List

New categories and their relevance to conservation

John Holmes, John Marchant, Neil Bucknell, David Stroud and David T. Parkin

ABSTRACT In January 1998, the BOU will publish a new List, based on a revised categorisation. A scientifically credible list is needed for listing purposes and so that conservation organisations have an objective baseline from which to work. This is essential for legal casework, for ensuring common standards in reporting on the state of biodiversity, and especially for providing advice to Government on strengthening the law regarding the release and escape of bird species.

Over the last four years, the issue of escaped and introduced birds has been at the forefront of the work of the British Ornithologists' Union, both through its Records Committee (BOURC), in maintaining the lists of birds of Britain and Ireland, and through its Ornithological Affairs Committee, which advises the BOU's Council on ornithological matters. One of the most significant outcomes of this work is a redefinition of the existing categories (A to D) and the addition of a new category (E) for escapes. These categories will for the first time provide the means to produce a complete list of all the birds recorded in the wild, and will assist conservation agencies and Government in their

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work, particularly regarding the legal status of different bird species. The new definitions deliberately exclude any geographical references and so can be applied within any set of boundaries.

For many years, Irish records have been assessed by the Irish Rare Birds Committee (IRBC) and published separately as the Irish List in the 'Irish Bird Report' in *Irish Birds*. These records have traditionally been incorporated by the BOURC into a list for the whole zoogeographic region of Great Britain and Ireland. For legislative and reporting reasons (see below), it is necessary to distinguish which birds occur in Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. It has been agreed that records from Northern Ireland will be assessed by members of the ornithological community from that region, who will publish a separate Northern Irish bird list. Records from the Isle of Man will continue to be assessed by the BOURC and the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC), though a separate Manx List will be maintained by the Manx Ornithological Society and published in its journal, *Peregrine*. Decisions that affect the status of individual species will be published by the BOU in *Ibis*, and combined into a total for the United Kingdom (Britain and Northern Ireland) and the Isle of Man for the benefit of conservationists, birdwatchers and legislators. The IRBC will continue to produce a separate Irish List by incorporating decisions from Northern Ireland with its own. This will serve a faunistic purpose by ensuring that a list of birds is available for the whole zoogeographical region of Ireland, without confusing the legislative needs for separate lists for the two political units that comprise the region.

The new categories

The review of categories used by the BOURC was initiated after the BOU/Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) Spring Conference in 1995 on naturalised and introduced birds (Holmes & Simons 1996). During the Conference, it became clear that a variety of terms was being used with different meanings in different situations to describe species or populations of species whose presence in a given area results from introduction by human beings. Recommendations for describing species with naturalised populations were developed in a plenary discussion session (Holmes & Stroud 1995). The BOURC has incorporated these suggestions into its review of categorisation and, with the BOU Council's approval, adopted the new categories defined in table 1 (see page 4).

The list proper will continue to consist of species established in the wild (i.e. categories A, B and C). Categories A and B will describe species that have occurred in an apparently natural state since 1st January 1950 and before 1st January 1950 respectively. The date for distinguishing between these two categories was formerly 1st January 1958 (when the BBRC commenced assessing records), but the BOURC will move to using 1950 to standardise with other rarities committees in Europe*.

Category C has been subdivided to make clear the origins of those species that are established in the wild as a result of introductions, either deliberate or

*The BBRC is in the process of assessing relevant 1950-57 records prior to adopting 1.1.50 (instead of 1.1.58) as its revised starting date. EDS

Table 1. The new BOURC categories.

Category	Definition
A	*Species that have been recorded in an apparently natural state at least once since 1st January 1950.*
B	*Species that would otherwise be in Category A but have not been recorded since 31st December 1949.*
C	*Species that, although originally introduced by Man, either deliberately or accidentally, have established breeding populations derived from introduced stock that maintain themselves without necessary recourse to further introduction.*
	C1 NATURALISED INTRODUCTIONS *Species that have occurred only as a result of introduction.*
	C2 NATURALISED ESTABLISHMENTS *Species with established populations as a result of introduction by Man, but which also occur in an apparently natural state.*
	C3 NATURALISED RE-ESTABLISHMENTS *Species with populations successfully re-established by Man in areas of former occurrence.*
	C4 NATURALISED FERAL SPECIES *Domesticated species with populations established in the wild.*
	C5 VAGRANT NATURALISED SPECIES *Species from established naturalised populations abroad.*
D	*Species that would otherwise appear in Categories A or B except that there is reasonable doubt that they have ever occurred in a natural state.*
E	*Species that have been recorded as introductions, transportees or escapees from captivity, and whose breeding populations (if any) are thought not to be self-sustaining.*

accidental. Previously, the term 'feral' was often applied to all such species, whether they were naturalised aliens (such as the Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*) or re-established as part of a conservation programme (such as the Red Kite *Milvus milvus*). Examples of species in the subcategories of C are given in table 2.

Category D was introduced in 1971 to act as a holding category for species that may qualify for the main list in the future. The BOURC reviews the status of these species periodically to determine whether transfer to the main list would be appropriate. This category formerly included a number of subdivisions, but has now been reduced to a single category. Category D1 was for species for which 'there was a reasonable doubt that they had ever occurred [here] in a wild state'. Category D2 was for species that arrived with 'a combination of ship and human assistance'. Ship assistance is no longer a barrier to admission to the national list as it is now regarded as a normal means of dispersal. Human assistance is a different matter: a bird that receives direct assistance, such as the provision of food or shelter, is little different from a bird

Table 2. Some examples of species in Category C.

Category	Examples
C1 Naturalised introductions	Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*, Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*, Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus*, Little Owl *Athene noctua*
C2 Naturalised establishments	Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*, Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*, Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*
C3 Naturalised re-establishments	Red Kite *Milvus milvus* (in England and Scotland), Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*
C4 Naturalised feral species	Rock Dove *Columba livia*
C5 Vagrant naturalised species	None accepted as yet by BOURC, though some/all Ruddy Shelducks *Tadorna ferruginea* occurring here must fall into this category, as well as some Red-crested Pochards *Netta rufina*. Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* is a likely future vagrant from the naturalised alien population in France.

that escapes from captivity. In the absence of human interference, it would have died, so it belongs in Category E.

Birds found dead on the tideline were formerly placed in D3, but they will in future be assessed as for any other record. If there is any doubt about their origin, they belong in D. If there is no doubt, then they should go into A if they arrived naturally, or E if they escaped from captivity. If they are believed to have died outside territorial waters, then they will be rejected. Species that previously were placed in D4 are breeding birds that originated as escapes, but have not formed a self-sustaining wild population. Such species would now be placed in E* (see below).

The new Category E

Category E has been newly created to accommodate species occurring as escapes, but which are not yet firmly established. Escapes will be in Category E; escapes which have bred will be in subcategory 'E*'. This is the first attempt by the BOU to maintain a list of species occurring as escapes and represents a significant step forward in the monitoring of birds in the UK and the Isle of Man. BOURC will not formally assess records of such species for identification, but will maintain the list based on information received, mainly from county bird reports. The Rare Breeding Birds Panel has now begun to collate records of breeding in the wild by escapes and scarcer introductions, and aims to publish an annual report summarising their breeding status. These species will also be highlighted in the BOURC's list (Ogilvie 1997).

The addition of Category E provides, for the first time, a complete picture of all the bird species (including escapes) occurring in the wild in Britain. This may seem like overkill to those who are interested simply in keeping a list of the 'real' birds they have seen in the wild. For those organisations responsible for making nature-conservation policy decisions, however, the ability to track introduced species from the first escapes to the initial stages of breeding, through (in some cases) to establishment in the wild, is an important step forward. It will, for the first time, allow unambiguous statements of the status of these species to be made.

Category E provides a place for records of known escapes that, after having been rejected as wild birds by the BBRC or by county records committees, were previously largely forgotten. Assessments of the likely origin of rare exotics have not always taken into account the existence of earlier records of the species already rejected by other committees as escapes, releases or transportees. In future, the extended categorisation of the BOU list will illustrate that, while species such as Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*, Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*, Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* and Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus* are all in Category A, not every individual of these species has occurred naturally in Britain.

Category E will also function as a reminder to members of records committees at all levels that possible confusion species extend well beyond the confines of the traditional British & Irish List. For example, a number of exotic cagebirds have long been considered confusable with European Serins *Serinus serinus* (Holman & Madge 1982) and clearly this principle could extend to many more species.

Why maintain an official list?

The advantage of the BOURC's list is that it is compiled in a consistent and scientifically rigorous manner; the addition of new species to the list is considered objectively in terms of proven identification and the likelihood of natural occurrence. Close liaison is maintained with the BBRC, whose confirmation of identification is required before a species new to Britain would be admitted to the list. Similarly, advice from acknowledged experts is sought to aid consideration of any taxonomic changes, such as the recent splitting of Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* from Northern Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* (BOU 1997). A consequence of this approach is that conservation agencies can use the BOU's list, safe in the knowledge that a rigorous process is undertaken during its compilation. This may be especially important in advising on legal issues, where the status of an individual bird may be discussed in court.

The current law and suggestions for reform

It may seem intuitively obvious what a wild bird is. To birders it is usually a species that would be counted on their lists. For the purposes of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, the primary legislation governing bird protection, the term 'wild bird' is defined as:

'any bird of a kind which is ordinarily resident in or is a visitor to Great Britain in a wild state but does not include poultry or . . . [except in certain circumstances] . . . any game bird'.[1]

This definition of wild birds includes established introduced alien species such as Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri,* as well as native species and vagrants. Section 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act provides protection for all wild birds (as defined above), their nests and their eggs. Alien species, therefore, get the same level of protection as native ones, provided that they are ordinarily resident in Britain in a wild state. The terms 'ordinarily resident' and 'wild state' are not defined in the Act, so lawyers would rely on dictionary definitions. Once a species becomes established in the wild, therefore, it is protected by law.

The protection afforded to wild birds by Section 1 of the Act does not, however, apply to any individual bird which is shown to have been bred in captivity, so a captive-bred bird of any species could, in theory, be captured or killed if it escapes (though property and cruelty laws could still apply). If that bird breeds in the wild, though, any offspring would probably be protected if the bird is of a kind (usually taken to mean 'species') which is ordinarily resident in or is a visitor in a wild state to Britain. We say 'probably' because we are not aware that this point of detail has been tested in the courts. On occasions, the BOURC has been asked to provide advice during investigations where questions over the status of species have been raised.

The law relating to release and escape of birds in Britain is complex, but concern has been expressed that it has not been successful in preventing the continued escape and establishment of alien species and of species outside

[1] 'Game birds' are pheasants, partridges, grouse and ptarmigan, and are protected by the Game Acts.

their natural range in Britain. The BOU's revised classification highlights some of the law's shortcomings.

Three significant problems are as follows:

1. *Once a species is established, it is protected in law regardless of whether it is native to this country.*

Section 14 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act makes it an offence to release or allow to escape into the wild any animal which:

'is of a kind which is not ordinarily resident in and is not a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state; or is included in Part 1 of Schedule 9.'

Table 3 lists the birds currently on Schedule 9, Part 1. The title given to this part of the Schedule is 'Animals which are established in the wild'. Note that the Schedule includes aliens (e.g. Egyptian Goose), native residents (e.g. Barn Owl *Tyto alba*), native species released in attempts to re-establish them (e.g. White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*) and species which breed in the wild as a result of introductions but also occur naturally from time to time (e.g. Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*). All but one of these species have been on Schedule 9 since the Wildlife & Countryside Act entered legislation in 1981; the Barn Owl was added to the list in 1992, to regulate its widespread release.

There is further confusion between status given in legislation and that from scientific assessment. Note, for example, that Northern Bobwhite *Colinus virginianus* (Bobwhite Quail in table 3), Rock Partridge *Alectoris graeca* and Chukar Partridge *Alectoris chukar* may be considered 'established' in law by virtue of their being listed on Schedule 9, although none is currently accepted in Category C by the BOURC.

Table 3. Birds currently listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. The English names not in parentheses are those used in the Act itself.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*	Rock Partridge *Alectoris graeca*
Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*	Chukar Partridge *Alectoris chukar*
Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*	Silver Pheasant *Lophura nycthemera*
Carolina Wood Duck (Wood Duck) *Aix sponsa*	Reeve's Pheasant (Reeves's Pheasant) *Syrmaticus reevesii*
Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*	Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus*
Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*	Lady Amherst's Pheasant *Chrysolophus amherstiae*
White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*	Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus*
Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*	Ring-necked Parakeet (Rose-ringed Parakeet) *Psittacula krameri*
Bobwhite Quail (Northern Bobwhite) *Colinus virginianus*	Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Species in Category C have established regular breeding populations which are self-sustaining. It is, therefore, likely that a court would find that such a species would be 'ordinarily resident', establishing a loophole which could result in alien species being released into the wild without the possibility of prosecution under Section 14, if Schedule 9 were not regularly reviewed to prevent this.

2. *It is legal to release most native bird species (unless listed on Schedule 9) without any authorisation.*

The law allows the release anywhere in Britain of native species, including regular visitors and wintering species that do not normally breed here. This results in the establishment of species such as Red-crested Pochard *Netta*

rufina outside their natural breeding range (which does not extend to Britain) and is significantly at odds with the conservation of biodiversity.

3. *Control of species once established.*

The recent history of the Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* demonstrates how difficult it can be to retrieve the situation once a species has become established. Despite firm evidence that this alien species seriously threatens the White-headed Duck *O. leucocephala* throughout the latter's native range, some people remain opposed to controlling the Ruddy Duck. It has been suggested that consideration be given to controlling the British population of Rose-ringed Parakeets *Psittacula krameri* while it is still relatively small and before it starts to threaten seriously fruit-growers' crops or native hole-nesting species (Feare 1996). How would the public react to this, though? In the future, prevention must be considered better than cure.

The problems resulting from the establishment of exotic fauna and flora are rapidly becoming an issue of priority importance for international nature conservation. Thus, the recently finalised African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement of the Bonn Convention requires that signatory states:

'Prohibit the deliberate introduction of non-native waterbird species into the environment and take all appropriate measures to prevent the unintentional release of such species if this introduction or release would prejudice the conservation status of any wild flora and fauna: when non-native waterbird species have already been introduced, the Parties [to the Agreement] shall take requisite measures to prevent these species from becoming a potential threat to indigenous species' (Article 3g).

The Berne Convention is actively discussing the potential to tighten international legislation relating to introductions, and the Biodiversity Convention also lays strong obligations on its signatories (which include the UK). To effect the UK's international obligations we must, however, use or further develop domestic legislation.

The BOU's Council considered it timely to call for a review of the legislation relating to releases and has held discussions with the JNCC, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the RSPB, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and the BTO. It is possible that the Wildlife & Countryside Act will be formally reviewed in the near future. Suggestions for improving the situation regarding releases include the introduction of a licensing system for release of any bird species, even native ones, backed up by a series of best-practice guidelines for well-planned re-establishment programmes such as that for the Red Kite in England and Scotland (Evans & Pienkowski 1991). A general prohibition of the release of all species would obviate the need to update Schedule 9 and avoid the problems involved in trying to define a species' natural range in Britain. Exceptions would have to be made for traditional activities such as game-rearing and pigeon-racing. The new categories will make the status of all bird species clearer than ever before and provide a basis for consideration of the complex conservation-policy issues by Government and its agencies.

It must be recognised that any legislation should be workable and that its application to taxa other than birds will influence the options open to

Government. In addition to changes in legislation, much greater efforts should be made to educate the general public, and in particular aviculturists, about the dangers of releasing birds (either deliberately or accidentally) into the wild, and the conservation reasons for controlling them if they do escape.

A provisional list of species for the new Category E of species recorded as escapes since 1950 has been compiled by the BOURC and includes almost 300 species. About one-sixth of these have been recorded as having bred in the wild. This is a sobering statistic, whether one is concerned with the conservation problems that these species may pose, or simply about what species to tick on a personal list. The new category will in effect provide an early-warning system, allowing potential future problem species to be flagged up to Government and its conservation agencies, as well as providing a more open means of informing birders on the occurrence of escapes for any particular species.

The scientific record

A rigorous British List forms part of the nation's scientific record. The JNCC is working with other organisations to establish a national species dictionary: that is, an agreed list of species (across all taxonomic groups), which occur in the UK, with their scientific and English names. This forms part of a larger project to increase the usefulness of biological data. It may seem surprising that there is not already an agreed list of species for the UK. For some groups, a variety of taxonomies is in use, reducing the value of some information to scientific and conservation organisations. An agreed list of taxa will ensure that we are all speaking a common language. For birds, along with some other vertebrates, we are ahead of most flora and fauna recorders in having (through BOURC) a system through which taxonomic changes are considered. The BOU British List, along with the Northern Ireland subset of the Irish List and the Manx List, should therefore provide the standard list for birds included in a UK species dictionary.[2]

Agreeing a UK species dictionary may not seem particularly important, but it becomes essential when a question such as 'How many species does the UK have?' is asked. This type of question is frequently asked of the JNCC, which compiles reports for Government, the European Commission, and the secretariats of international conservation conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. Without an agreed taxonomy, this question is impossible to answer. While it may seem obvious to a birder that you do not count Great Skua and Bonxie *Catharacta skua* as two species, a Government official or civil servant in Europe, compiling summary statistics, cannot be expected to know details of all the estimated 96,000 species of plant and animal occurring in the UK and its territorial waters (Anon. 1995).

Note that it is important for the JNCC to be able to distinguish GB and UK lists for different purposes. The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 applies to Britain only (the equivalent for Northern Ireland is the Wildlife Order 1985 and, for the Isle of Man, the Wildlife Act 1990), so separate lists are essential to underpin the application of these pieces of legislation. On the other hand, reports to Government, the European Commission or convention secretariats

[2] Note that this does not necessarily mean that we shall all be forced to use agreed English names, but that, whatever name we use, we know the taxon to which we are referring.

are usually made at the UK level, so it is important to be able to aggregate the British List with those species recorded in Northern Ireland if necessary.[3]

Birding with the British & Irish List

We think it likely that most birders will continue to look to the BOURC's British List, along with the IRBC's Irish List, in order to assess what to count. This remains an important function of these lists and care has been taken to ensure that the new definitions remain clear and easy to follow. Other birding organisations and the birding Press were consulted before the changes were agreed. Some have commented that the BOURC has been unnecessarily strict in rejecting some records (e.g. Anon., *Birding World* 9: 2). It is, however, important to remember that admission of a species to Categories A, B or C of the BOU List may have legislative consequences. The admission of species which are open to justifiable criticism could bring the entire List into disrepute, potentially weakening its usefulness in protecting wild birds. While every effort is made to reach a balanced conclusion, it seems better for conservation if one or two stronger cases are excluded than for weaker cases to be included.

Some birders may consider that the burden of proof for either splitting a species or accepting a new species in Category A should be less for the purposes of their own lists. They are free to develop their own lists for their own purposes if they wish, though clearly some national standard is needed if listed records are to be compared. For the purposes of competitive listing, there is no objection to including Category D or even some Category E species. The BOURC will, however, continue to ensure that its British List is maintained to scientifically rigid standards in order that it can fulfil roles additional to personal listing.

Conclusion

Listing by individual birders is only one of the uses for the BOU List. A rigorously maintained and scientifically credible list is an essential tool for conservation organisations, and contributes to the maintenance of the scientific record. By developing the categories used for compiling the British List, the BOURC is able to ensure that it can continue to provide the best possible information for a variety of purposes.

The redefined categories used by the BOURC can operate on any geographical scale and have now been adopted as standard by the Association of European Rarities Committees. Exciting future developments include the production of a European List. Counties or regions in Britain could even produce their own check-lists based on these new categories.

The BOURC's re-evaluation of its categories highlights once again the scale of occurrence of escapes and introductions. Whilst Government is being urged to help rectify this situation, the ornithological community can play its part by recording such species, particularly when breeding occurs. Editors of all county reports are therefore strongly encouraged to include all records of escapes, as indeed some counties have already done for several years.

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[3] So far, within Category A, Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca* and Elegant Tern *Sterna elegans* have been recorded in Northern Ireland but not in Britain, and Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* in the Isle of Man but not in Britain.

Acknowledgments

We should like to thank our colleagues on the BOU's Ornithological Affairs Committee and Records Committee for their help in developing the new categories and for constructive comments on an earlier version of this paper. In addition, discussions with the following people have helped considerably in the development of the ideas contained in this paper: Aron Sapsford, Chris Feare, Mike Pienkowski, Baz Hughes, Gwyn Williams, John Clorley and Colin Galbraith.

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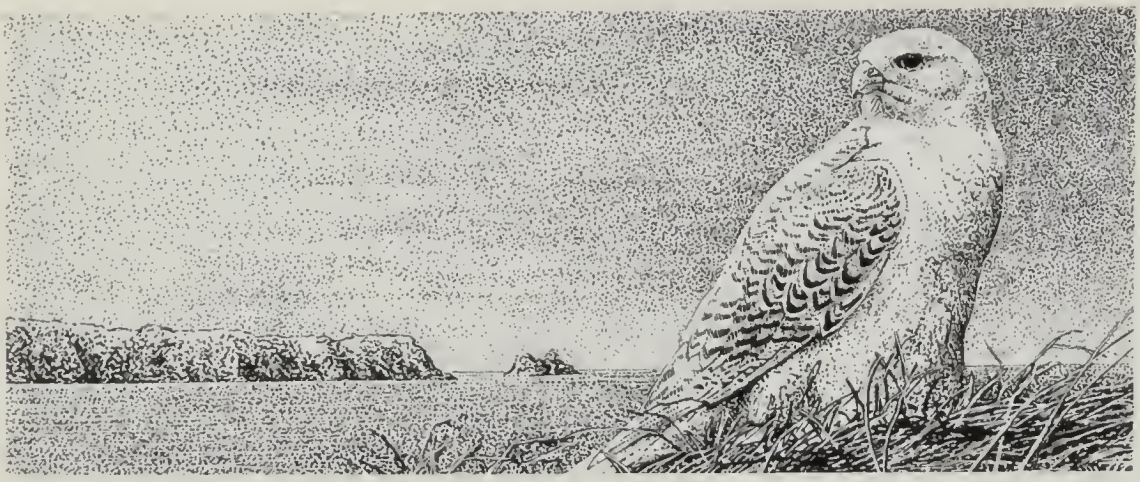
LOOKING BACK

'EDITORIAL CHANGES AT BEDFORD This month sees a major change in the editorial arrangements for *British Birds* with the departure of I. J. Ferguson-Lees to take up the position of deputy director (conservation) with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. James Ferguson-Lees has spent almost all his working life as executive editor of *British Birds*; indeed, with the exception of its founder, H. F. Witherby, he has served in a major editorial post for a longer period than anyone in the journal's history. In June 1952, while still a schoolmaster and only 23, he took over on a voluntary basis from J. D. Wood as assistant editor and then in October 1954 he was appointed as its first full-time executive editor . . . His services to *British Birds* for more than 20 years have been invaluable. He has been an outstanding editor, painstaking and accurate, and the many new developments during this period owe much to his energy and inspiration . . . He has become one of the best-known figures in modern British ornithology, exerting a powerful influence on many aspects of developments in recent years. He is also well known on the international scene, especially for his efforts to encourage the co-ordination and extension of amateur research on a European basis.' (*Brit. Birds* 66: 45, February 1973)



Field identification of large falcons in the West Palearctic

Hadoram Shirihai, Dick Forsman and David A. Christie
Illustrations by John Gale

ABSTRACT The five species of large falcon *Falco* which occur in the West Palearctic present one of the more daunting identification challenges. This paper describes all plumages likely to be met with in this region, including geographical and age-related variations, and discusses the problems involved and the best ways of approaching these. Structure, silhouette and flight behaviour are important factors, and detailed examination of plumage is usually also a prerequisite for correct identification of these awe-inspiring raptors.

The large falcons *Falco* constitute one of the most impressive and exciting groups of birds. They have long attracted great interest and attention among ornithologists, professional and amateur alike, and their appeal is such that even non-birdwatchers are drawn to them.

Over the last 17 years, we have taken a major interest in these spectacular raptors. In particular, HS and DF have spent many days in the field studying all five of the large-falcon species, and their subspecies, which occur in the West Palearctic. These studies have been carried out in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Kazakhstan and elsewhere, and have involved detailed observation of all known plumages (in relation to age-classes), including the capturing and ringing of many individual falcons. We have also examined all plumages at great length in zoological gardens and in most of the large museum collections in Europe. The following text, which combines and

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expands our studies of these species (see Shirihai *et al.* 1996; Forsman in press), summarises our findings to date on their field identification.

Of the five species occurring in the West Palearctic, the most familiar to most people is the Peregrine Falcon *F. peregrinus*: this is a cosmopolitan species which is widespread in the region, being rare to locally common, and resident, dispersive or migratory, the most migratory race (*calidus* of the northern tundra) wintering as far south as South Africa; it is found in a wide range of usually open habitats, from arctic/alpine to semi-desert. The Gyr Falcon *F. rusticolus*, by contrast, is a rare breeder, largely confined to the arctic and subarctic belt, where it is mainly resident to partially migratory, rarely extending farther south than 60°N in winter, and occurring as a vagrant in western Europe south to Portugal and Italy; it inhabits open terrain, such as tundra, barren uplands or rocky coasts, often in partly wooded areas. The Saker Falcon *F. cherrug* is rather widely distributed, but uncommon and generally declining, in warm-temperate zones from the Central Asiatic steppes west to southeast Europe (mainly Hungary) and Turkey; it also winters regularly in arid parts of the Middle East, with a few records from the rest of Europe and Morocco. The Lanner Falcon *F. biarmicus*, also declining, generally replaces the Saker in the Mediterranean region and in Africa, overlapping in range primarily in winter or on passage, with three races in the West Palearctic, all of which are mostly resident, but with a few individuals (juveniles) migrating: *feldeggii* breeds in Italy, the Balkans and Asia Minor, *tanypterus* in the Middle East and west to Libya, and *erlangeri* in northwest Africa; all three typically inhabit dry areas, especially semi-desert and desert in the east and south. Finally, the Barbary Falcon *F. pelegrinoides* is largely confined to the deserts of North Africa and the Middle East, and is mostly resident and dispersive.

The taxonomic position of the Barbary Falcon has long been a matter of debate, especially with regard to its relationship with the southern race *brookei* of Peregrine Falcon in areas where the two come into close contact. They closely resemble each other in size, shape and plumage. They are reported to overlap in range, but apparently without interbreeding, and they seem to be separated mainly by habitat, with Barbary totally adapted to desert environments. For the purposes of this paper, and since the two taxa can, with care, be separated in the field, we treat them as separate species.

The basic identification problems

The main problems for the observer are to a large extent related to geography. The question of distinguishing Gyr from Peregrine arises chiefly in North Europe (but also in Central and northwest Europe), and involves in particular the darkish grey morph of Gyr (Scandinavia and northwest Russia) and non-adult Peregrine (especially large females of the race *calidus*). Pale juvenile grey-morph Gyr has to be separated from immature European Saker in countries where either could occur as a vagrant, while separating Lanner and Saker Falcons (mainly in non-adult plumages) is a problem chiefly in areas where the two meet in winter or on passage, or where either could occur as a vagrant. Not only is the Barbary Falcon of Middle Eastern deserts superficially similar to Lanner in most plumages, but it can also be really difficult to separate from

adult Peregrine of the southern race *brookei*, and from any race of Peregrine when dealing with non-adults.

Nowadays, however, the likelihood of falcons escaping from captivity is very high anywhere in the region, and extreme caution is required with any single large falcon outside its normal range. It is equally important to try to determine whether such individuals are escapes or true wild vagrants.

In recent years, the artificial cross-breeding of falcons in captivity has been practised by a number of misguided individuals and agencies (see e.g. Gantlett & Millington 1992), and the possibility that such unnatural hybrids which result from this may escape or, worse, be deliberately released serves only to increase the difficulties that already exist in identifying large falcons. Some of these hybrids, the various combinations of which may take little account of natural genetic relationships, are almost certainly unidentifiable in the field, or even in the hand; but, when they do occur as genuine escapes, they can cause the diligent observer a great deal of head-scratching and many wasted hours in the field. Discussion of hybrids is beyond the scope of this paper, and it would in any case seem a more prudent approach to acquaint oneself with the individual and geographical variations that exist naturally within wild populations of large falcons.

General structure, sex and age

The largest species are Gyr, Saker and Lanner Falcons, all of which have more rounded wings, with outermost primary shorter than 3rd, and a proportionately longer tail than Peregrine and Barbary Falcons. The last two have more pointed wings, with outermost primary longer than 3rd, and a comparatively shorter tail. While most forms of the first three species are generally larger and heavier than any Peregrine or Barbary, males of all five species average distinctly smaller than their respective females; note that, at least in some cases, large females of smaller species can overlap in size with smallish males of larger ones. Males are usually more finely patterned than females, and normally also become paler with age.

Given reasonable views, ageing is not that difficult in the case of Peregrine and Barbary Falcons, but is less straightforward for Lanner and Gyr, and can be more difficult for Saker. Juveniles are, in general, longer-tailed and narrower-winged than adults, and in most cases have bluish to greyish (not clear yellow) feet, cere and orbital ring; on some species, this colour may be retained through to their first winter. Compared with adults, they tend to have a more patterned underwing (Gyr, Saker and Lanner) and head, a more boldly streaked body (on species in which adult is barred below, the juvenile is mainly streaked), darker and less marked upperparts but (most species) with stronger rusty fringes, and a fairly prominent white tip to the tail if this is not too worn.

Juveniles undergo a partial body moult during their first winter and a complete moult in the first spring/summer, although a few juvenile feathers, especially wing-coverts, are sometimes still retained. First-summers are often rather similar to adults in general appearance, but with retained juvenile remiges and most or all rectrices, as well as varying amounts of retained juvenile coverts and other body feathers, all of which are juvenile-like in

pattern but browner and worn; some individuals which may have moulted much of their body and covert feathers are best aged by the fact that they show moult contrasts, with mostly retained juvenile flight and tail feathers.

Gyr Falcon

Main confusion species: Peregrine Falcon (see adult Gyr); Saker Falcon (see juvenile Gyr).

Structure, silhouette and jizz

The largest and heaviest of all falcons, generally appearing very big, solid, broad-bodied and powerful, with a proportionately full and broad head. Can even match Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* in its robustness when perched and its wingspan in flight. Appears heavy in flight, with large, well-projecting head, full-chested barrel-shaped body and bulging vent (bulky undertail-coverts), relatively long but broad-based and rather blunt-tipped wings, and longish tail. The big body, broad wings (in particular, large arm and rather rounded tip) and longish tail often give the impression, particularly when flying away, of a female Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, an impression reinforced by the rather stiff wingbeats, but that species has an even longer tail and much shorter, broader and blunter-tipped wings with S-shaped curve to trailing edge, as well as very different flight attitude and wing and tail patterns.

Differs from Peregrine in being larger and heavier-bodied, with longer and fuller tail and proportionately shorter wings (typically, also broader throughout their length), with fuller hand and distinctly more rounded tip. These structural differences are most obvious when bird is soaring with wings extended.

To the experienced observer, Gyr differs from Saker Falcon in having broader-armed and blunter-tipped wings (longer, narrower and more pointed on Saker), while its almost equally longish tail is much fuller and thicker-based, giving impression that body continues into underside of tail (Saker has distinctly slimmer tail, especially where it meets the body). Gyr is also more or less evenly broad-bodied from breast to vent (Saker's typically slim body is broadest at breast and tapers rearwards, recalling a harrier *Circus*).

Gyr perches upright, appearing robust and deep-chested with very prominent shoulders, and with dense belly feathering and bushy trousers almost concealing the tarsi (legs more exposed on other species). Its wingtips always fall well short of the tail tip, so that tail projection is similar to or slightly longer than on Saker, but much longer than on Lanner and, especially, Peregrine Falcons.

Note that Greenland Gyr Falcons average slightly larger than the Icelandic population and even more so than Scandinavian Gyrs, but this is rarely assessible in the field.

Flight behaviour

Flying Gyr looks powerful, with a slower action than Peregrine. Clumsy on take-off, with rather long flight before really airborne; wingbeats slower and shallower, and almost as if executed by hands alone, giving impression of more

(text continues on page 22)

Fig. 1. Perched Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* **(1-7) and Barbary Falcons** *F. pelegrinoides* **(8-12)** (*John Gale*). Adults finely barred below; moustache prominent, dark and rounded at end. Juveniles have prominent, dark and rounded moustache; feet become yellow soon after fledging.
PEREGRINE: *F. p. peregrinus* adult (1), juvenile (2), and first-summer in worn juvenile plumage (3). *F. p. brookei* adult (4) and juvenile (5): averages darker above, with broader moustache, smaller white cheek patch. *F. p. calidus* adult (6) and juvenile (7): averages bigger and paler than nominate.
BARBARY: Head pattern of adults variable, darker birds (8) at times identical to *brookei* Peregrine, while those with more rufous (9) distinctive; juveniles in autumn/winter (10), spring (11) and summer (12) paler than *brookei*.

Fig. 2. Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* **(1-9) and Barbary Falcons** *F. pelegrinoides* **(10-15) in flight** (*John Gale*). Rather uniformly patterned underwing, rump paler than rest of upperparts (not so on all juveniles), and moustache solid with rounded end. Extensive individual as well as age- and sex-dependent variation makes subspecific identification of single Peregrines inadvisable.
PEREGRINE: *F. p. peregrinus* adults (1, 2) and juvenile (3). *F. p. calidus* adult (4) and juveniles (5, 6): averages larger and paler than nominate, but considerable overlap. *F. p. brookei* adults (7, 8) and juvenile (9): smallest and darkest race (equals Barbary in size).
BARBARY: Adults (10-12) paler and sandier below than Peregrine, with finer markings often concentrated on flanks, usually paler grey above (rufous of head rarely seen in flight); juveniles (13-15) paler below with finer markings than Peregrine.

Fig. 3. Perched Saker *Falco cherrug* **(1-7) and Lanner Falcons** *F. biarmicus* **(8-14)** (*John Gale*).
SAKER: Fairly long-tailed and short-winged; best aged by foot colour. European adults (1, 2) with rufous fringes above, breast and flanks spotted (not barred); Asiatic *milvipes* (3) rufous and barred above; greyish *'saceroides'* (4) can superficially resemble adult Lanner; moustache often separated from dark eye by pale area. Juveniles (5-7) streaked below, more uniform above; worn spring juvenile (7) greyish above, often a few new scapular and mantle feathers.
LANNER: Adult *feldeggii* (8) darker and more heavily patterned than smaller and paler *tanypterus* (9) and *erlangeri* (10). Juveniles (11-14) mostly show prominent narrow moustache joining equally dark line through eye; crown yellow-buff with dark forecrown band and dark line above pale supercilium (unlike Saker, often acquires yellow feet early in first year of life); worn spring juvenile (14).

Fig. 4. Saker *Falco cherrug* **(1-6) and Lanner Falcons** *F. biarmicus* **(7-10) in flight** (*John Gale*). Juveniles show strong contrast between darker underwing-coverts and paler remiges; adult Saker often very similar, while adult Lanner paler, with heavier bars on greater coverts only.
SAKER: Ageing often truly difficult. Adult *cyanopus* (1, 2) and *'saceroides'* (3) more spotted on underbody, remiges more clearly barred; juveniles (4-6) streaked below, secondaries greyer with less prominent barring. Both ages show brownish upperparts contrasting with darker hand and paler tail.
LANNER: Adult *tanypterus* (7, 8) distinctly grey above, with paler tail, buffish or yellowish crown; very pale below, with barred greater coverts and darker wingtip. Juveniles (9, 10) almost identical to juvenile Saker, but most have underwings pale-spotted, belly and trousers extensively pale.
(Cf. juvenile Gyr *F. rusticolus* (11, 12): less underwing contrast, more diffuse head pattern.)

Fig. 5. Gyr Falcons *Falco rusticolus* **(1-11)** (*John Gale*). Perched Gyr is the shortest-winged of all large falcons. Juveniles have blue feet and cere throughout first winter.
WHITE MORPH (1, 2): Extent of dark markings varies individually (and geographically). Best aged by colour of feet and cere: yellow on adults, bluish on juveniles.
GREY MORPH: Adults (3-7) barred grey above, breast spotted, flanks and thighs barred, head pattern variable (mostly clear supercilium, narrow moustache, streaked cheeks); in flight, lacks Peregrine's *F. peregrinus* paler rump. Juveniles (8-11) greyish-brown above, most with fine pale spots, dark markings on head and underparts varying in strength; in flight, fairly uniform above, tail paler, underwing-coverts more patterned than remiges (contrast less than on juvenile Lanner/Saker *F. biarmicus/F. cherrug*). Cf. underwing of juvenile Peregrine (12).

Fig. 1. Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* **(1-7) and Barbary Falcons** *F. pelegrinoides* **(8-12)** (*John Gale*).
PEREGRINE *peregrinus* adult (1), juvenile (2), and first-summer in worn juvenile plumage (3); *brookei* adult (4) and juvenile (5); *calidus* adult (6) and juvenile (7).
BARBARY Darker-headed adult (8) and adult with more rufous on head (9); juveniles (10-12) in autumn/winter, spring and summer.

Fig. 2. Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* **(1-9) and Barbary Falcons** *F. pelegrinoides* **(10-15)** (*John Gale*).

PEREGRINE adults (1, 2) and juvenile (3); *calidus* adult (4) and juveniles (5, 6); *brookei* adults (7, 8) and juvenile (9).

BARBARY Adults (10-12) and juveniles (13-15).

Fig. 3. Saker *Falco cherrug* **(1-7) and Lanner Falcons** *F. biarmicus* **(8-14)** (*John Gale*).
SAKER European adults (1, 2); Asiatic *milvipes* (3); greyish *'saceroides'* (4); juveniles (5-7); worn spring juvenile (7).
LANNER Adult *feldeggii* (8), *tanypterus* (9) and *erlangeri* (10); juveniles (11-14), worn spring juvenile (14).

Fig. 4. Saker *Falco cherrug* **(1-6) and Lanner Falcons** *F. biarmicus* **(7-10)** (*John Gale*).
SAKER Adult *cyanopus* (1, 2) and *'saceroides'* (3); juveniles (4-6).
LANNER Adult *tanypterus* (7, 8); juveniles (9, 10).
(Cf. juvenile Gyr *F. rusticolus* (11, 12): less underwing contrast, more diffuse head pattern.)

Fig. 5. Gyr Falcons *Falco rusticolus* **(1-11)** (*John Gale*).
WHITE MORPH (1, 2).
GREY MORPH Adults (3-7) and juveniles (8-11); cf. juvenile Peregrine *F. peregrinus* (12).

stable, shallow and elastic action. Hunts at lower levels, with fairly horizontal pursuit over ground, 'running down' its prey, which it often captures on the ground; only rarely performs high-level stoops like Peregrine. Like Saker, glides and soars with outermost wingtips bent upwards.

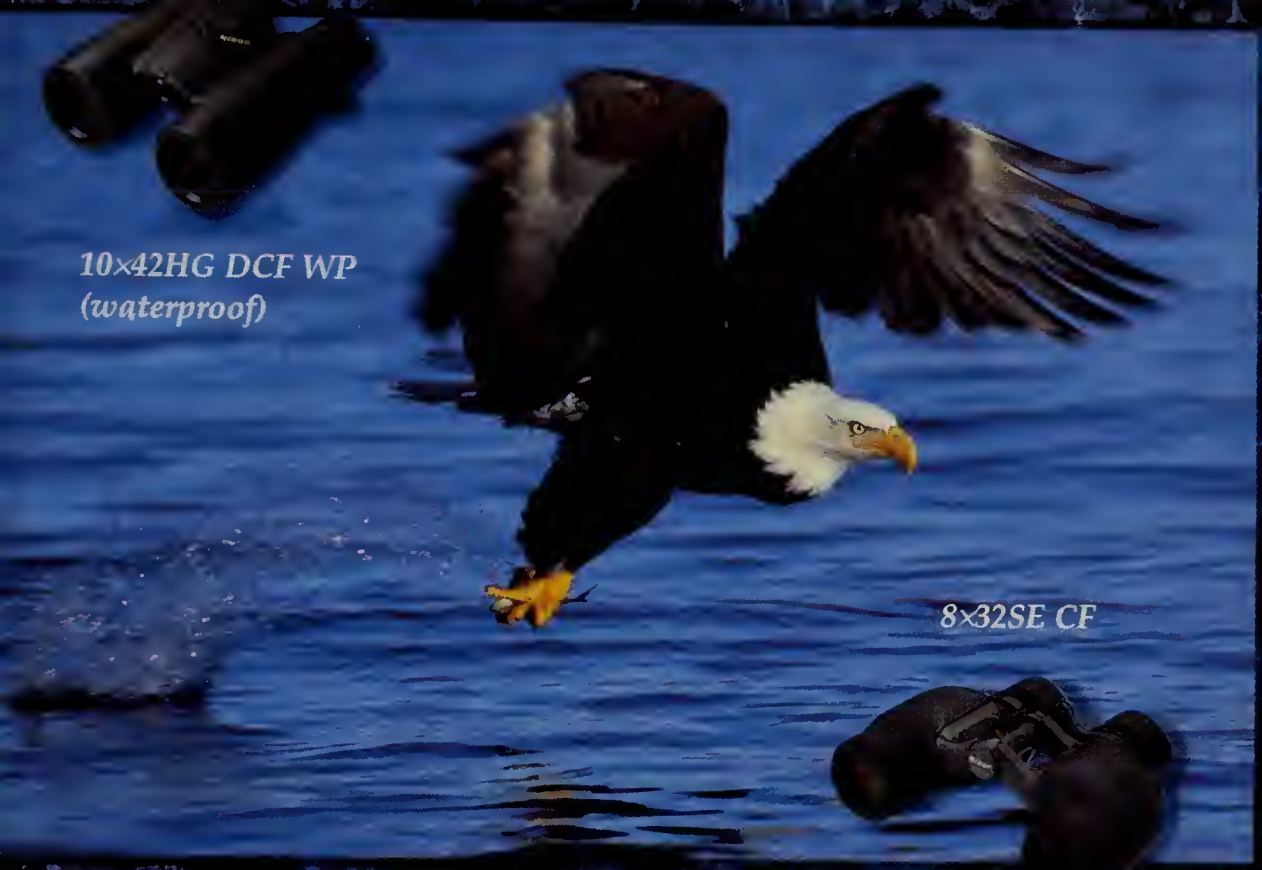
Plumage

Geographical plumage variation involves mostly frequency of colour morphs. 'White morph', breeding in the high Arctic, chiefly north Greenland but also east Siberia, and the most frequent vagrant to northwest Europe, is highly distinctive: white, with dark wingtips and varying amount of dark spotting; juveniles much as adults, but with browner (not blackish) markings and blue-grey (not yellow) legs. 'Grey morph' of the lower Arctic is predominantly greyish and occurs in two types: 'light grey' birds of south Greenland, Iceland and west Siberia are paler grey and whiter, with more pronounced and finer whitish and grey markings above; 'darkish grey' birds typical of the Nordic countries are medium-grey above with pale grey barring, but often with a variable brownish cast, and with better-developed broad 'falcon bonnet'. Note that 'light grey' Gyr Falcons sometimes occur as vagrants in northwest Europe, while 'darkish grey' ones move very little from their European breeding grounds.

In addition, an all-dark 'dark morph' occurs in North America, but has not been recorded in the West Palearctic, while a particoloured white-and-grey 'intermediate morph' seems to be frequent in Greenland, but is also found in north Europe. Since the plumages of these two, and of the white morph, are sufficiently distinctive not to cause any major identification problems, the following section concentrates on the two types of Scandinavian grey morph, which may be confused with Peregrine or Saker Falcons.

ADULT Head shows variably distinct (mostly narrow and indistinct) moustache, dark area around eye, obvious pale supercilium, and cheek patch of variable size and distinctiveness and usually dark-streaked. Most tend to have pale ashy-grey upperparts with finer darkish slate-grey barring, paler, silver-grey rump to tail with fine, dense blackish bars (usually narrower than intervening pale bars), and somewhat two-toned upperwing (paler arm); pale underparts rather finely spotted dark, with barred flanks, trousers and undertail-coverts; and moderate to strong contrast between rather plain translucent flight feathers (undertail similar) and slightly to much darker, typically barred, underwing-coverts, which form broad dark mid-wing panel. (Males generally have thinner, sparser markings, and palest males can have underparts almost plain except for reduced barring on flanks and smaller spots on lower belly.) Darker types have more-uniform dark slate-grey bonnet (at distance, similar to Peregrine's), and darker and more-uniform grey-brown upperparts with only suggestion of barring, but still with paler rump, uppertail-coverts and tail.

Usually distinctly heavier and larger than most Peregrine Falcons (though less so when compared with race *calidus*), and with different shape and flight action (see above). Differs from adult and most non-adult Peregrines in well-defined barring on upperparts (indiscernible and/or diffuse on Peregrine), two-toned underwing (much more uniform-looking on Peregrine), 'looser' and



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coarser spotting below with bold bars confined to flanks and trousers (Peregrine normally more densely and regularly barred as adult, streaked as non-adult), and more diffuse bonnet with moustache merging with streaky cheeks (well-demarcated bonnet and moustache with cleaner cheeks on most adult Peregrines, but less so on non-adults, particularly of race *calidus*). In flight, colour contrast between upperparts and underparts is less striking than on Peregrine.

Although confusion between Gyr and Saker Falcons is normally likely only in non-adult plumages (see below), certain adult Sakers of the so-called '*saceroides*' type can approach Gyr in showing an element of darker barring on pale buffish-grey upperparts, some bars on flanks, and sometimes even regular tail barring, as on adult Gyr. These individuals, however, can normally be identified as Sakers by having body streaking and underwing pattern typical of that species, as well as buffy-rufous feather margins above and less complete tail barring.

JUVENILE Differs from adult in having little or no pale barring on predominantly grey-brown upperparts, more distinct contrast between pale remiges and more heavily patterned (typically, streaked) underwing-coverts, and densely streaked underparts.

Plainer upperparts and streaked underparts make juvenile Gyr more likely to be confused with juvenile Peregrine, particularly of larger and paler race *calidus*, the more so since latter's bonnet is more broken, with less clear-cut moustache, and the two species are often rather similar in general coloration. With few exceptions, they are best separated by differences in silhouette and in underwing pattern (see above). In addition, most Gyrs have a less contrasty head pattern, with ear-coverts more streaked than on Peregrine (on which moustache usually contrasts clearly with paler cheeks), although darkest Gyrs may be much closer to Peregrine; uniform rump and tail, which are normally a shade paler than rest of upperparts (Peregrine shows little or no contrast, and tail gradually darkens towards tip); and a more clear-cut dark central nape patch.

Juvenile Gyr is superficially similar to juvenile Saker, but should be separable by the following characters:

1. *Structure* With practice, structural features useful (see above).

2. *Head pattern* While pale Gyr and darkish Saker often show very similar pattern, Gyr tends to have larger, broader moustache and variably streaked (and therefore less distinct) cheek patch, as well as darker crown with ill-defined eye-stripe, combining to produce a darker head with duskier ear-coverts; but beware that these features are variable.

3. *Upperparts and upperwings* Gyr is always more uniformly coloured above, with at least an element of grey toning, and sometimes a hint of pale barring, and with somewhat scaly pattern produced by variable amount of incomplete pale feather tips, and most tend to have speckled outer webs to primaries (most Sakers show two-toned upperparts, with darkish remiges and variable degree of pale and brownish pigments in upperwing-coverts, also producing paler arm and darker hand, while coverts also have narrow and more complete rusty fringes, and outer webs to primaries are plainer).

4. *Underparts* Juvenile Gyr is more or less evenly streaked from breast to undertail-coverts (Saker often has considerably paler upper breast that contrasts with lower breast and flanks, with trousers boldly streaked, and has poorly marked undertail-coverts).
5. *Underwing-coverts* Gyr, in comparison with equivalent-aged Saker (but especially juvenile), has less contrasting and less uniformly brown underwing-coverts, but both exhibit considerable variation.
6. *Tail* While most Gyr Falcons have denser and more distinct tail barring, considerable variation exists, and the tail pattern of some is more Saker-like, including virtually unmarked central rectrices. Note, however, that Gyr Falcons never have the *rounded* spots on tail shown by many Sakers.

Most of the above features can also be used to distinguish Gyr from Lanner Falcon, although in practice the two are unlikely to be confused and their natural ranges are well separated geographically.

Saker Falcon

Main confusion species: juvenile and grey-morph adult Gyr Falcon (see latter); immature Lanner Falcon (see under Saker Falcon, below).

Structure, silhouette and jizz

Large, rather heavy and powerful falcon, in size similar to or slightly smaller than Gyr Falcon, but slimmer and lighter in build; female's wingspan often matches that of Common Buzzard or Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*. Larger than Lanner Falcon only on average, but stronger and heavier. Despite a degree of individual variation, most are long-winged (arm fairly broad but long; hand moderately broad but long and relatively pointed), with long, slender, typically narrow-based tail and rather elongated though still deep-chested body. Perches in characteristic upright posture, but retains rather big-bodied appearance with relatively small head; noticeably long tail extends some 5 cm (often less on adults) beyond tips of closed wings, a useful distinction from Lanner and Peregrine Falcons.

In flight, usually looks distinctly larger and longer-winged than Peregrine and Barbary Falcons, with longer, broader arm and longer but rounded hand (rather than those species' triangular-shaped wings), as well as appearing slimmer and considerably longer-tailed, with less rounded body. Differs from Gyr in somewhat smaller size, with longer and more pointed wings and long-bodied appearance (see also above).

Very similar to Lanner Falcon, but is generally heavier, with longer, broader-based and blunter-tipped wings, longer tail, fuller chest and somewhat larger head, all producing stronger appearance compared with the more agile Lanner (whose flight silhouette may recall a short-tailed Common Kestrel *F. tinnunculus*). The differences are, however, subtle and not always assessible, especially when comparing male Saker and female Lanner.

Flight behaviour

A typical large falcon, powerful and heavy, but with wingbeats often appearing fast for its size. Flight action close to that of Gyr, or a little lighter; not that

much more powerful than Lanner, with slightly slower and shallower beats, action appearing more lazy than Lanner's effortless, fast and easy flight, but again differences subtle. Wingbeats of both Saker and Lanner appear less quick and less emphatic than those of the smaller Peregrine Falcon. Hunts at rather low level and stoops in typical large-falcon manner; takes most prey on or close above the ground. Often glides and soars with wingtips slightly upcurved.

Plumage

Saker Falcon's plumage varies both individually and geographically, tending to become paler eastwards and also with age, but paler and darker birds occur throughout range and in any age-class. West Palearctic race *cyanopus*, treated here, is unbarred above (except '*saceroides*' type). Asiatic races, most of which are apparently never recorded in the West Palearctic, are very different, with dark-barred rufous upperparts like female kestrels, and barred tail and flanks.

Adults and juveniles often show only marginal plumage differences, further obscured by individual variation. While those individuals with the palest head, only sparsely spotted breast and vivid rufous upperparts are likely to be adults, the following summaries should be taken only as a general guide with regard to ageing.

ADULT Reliably distinguished from juvenile or first-winter by yellow, rather than blue-grey, bare parts. Tail bars on average more complete, but can be as juvenile's, and upperparts, including upperwing-coverts, have broader but more diffuse rufous feather margins, often creating greater contrast against darker remiges. Markings below typically sparser and more in form of rounded spots (juvenile more streaked), tending to be denser and more streak-shaped on lower breast and flanks; underwing-coverts often have reduced dark markings and therefore show less contrast, and, since flight-feather bars are broader and whiter, the entire underwing is generally whiter than on first-years (on extreme pale adults, prominent markings are virtually restricted to greater coverts).

For separation from any plumage of Gyr Falcon, see under juvenile of that species. In normal circumstances, Saker is not too difficult to distinguish from any Peregrine, including very pale and large juvenile of race *calidus*, by size and shape, head and underwing patterns and upperwing contrast (including lack of Peregrine's paler rump and tail base); note different tail projections when perched.

Both adult and juvenile Saker Falcons can usually be separated from juvenile Lanner by the features listed below for juvenile Saker. Normally readily distinguished from adult Lanner of all races by unbarred upperparts with some rufous fringes (barred and greyish on Lanner); by usually paler head with regular, fine crown streaking, variable but generally prominent whitish supercilium, and fairly broad and more mottled eye-stripe (Lanner has darker, more conspicuous markings, including dark forecrown, clear-cut dark moustache and eye-stripe, and variable rufous on crown to nape, but note that very old Lanners may have more uniform crown with less contrasting markings); by minimal tail barring consisting merely of pale spots or with unmarked central rectrices (tail clearly and uniformly barred on adult Lanner);

and by bold dark flank streaking and more solid trouser streaking normally contrasting greatly with pale upper breast and pale central belly to undertail-coverts (adult Lanner more evenly patterned, markings less in form of streaks and more spot-like, and with variable barring on flanks and trousers). Generally, Saker has a stronger underwing pattern of heavier, denser streaking, with darker greater coverts than Lanner (which has more evenly marked underwing-coverts with finer bars, giving a paler, less patterned underwing). Beware, however, existence of '*saceroides*'-type Saker: this form often resembles adult Lanner in having dusky grey-brown or even predominantly greyish (as well as partly barred) upperparts and upperwing-coverts, but particularly lower back, rump and uppertail-coverts, as well as more complete tail barring and often variable bars on flanks and on whiter underwing-coverts, and rarely some rufous on crown. At a distance, some '*saceroides*' look very greyish and uniform and are exceedingly difficult to identify, but in most cases, given reasonable views, they can be told from Lanner by their typical Saker head pattern, by the presence of some rufous margins on the upperparts, and by their more obvious tail projection when perched.

JUVENILE Differs from adult in blue-grey bare-part coloration. Upperparts, including wing-coverts, dark earth-brown and less tawny, with only narrow and regular rufous margins to individual feathers, although at distance upperparts can appear more grey-brown with contrastingly darker remiges. Tail has distinct whitish tip, but less complete, oval-shaped pale bars, with central feather pair only barely spotted; tail appears slightly paler than rest of upperparts at distance. Underparts usually darker and more heavily patterned, with markings more streak-like (instead of being more drop-like spots) and extending more evenly over much of underbody and underwing-coverts, but still bolder or broadening towards flanks, trousers and rear underwing-coverts.

For separation from any plumage of Gyr Falcon, see juvenile of latter. A possible pitfall is large pale juvenile or immature Peregrine of race *calidus*: latter is shorter-winged and shorter-tailed; lacks Saker's elongated body shape, two-toned underwing and two densities of streaking on underwing-coverts; normally has at least some barring on lower flanks and undertail-coverts (never present on juvenile Saker or Lanner); is more uniform brown-grey above with distinctly paler rump and tail base, but without Saker's contrast between wing-coverts and darker remiges; usually has typical Peregrine head pattern of darker and more complete bonnet, with thicker moustache and reduced pale supercilium; and, when perched, has much shorter tail projection than Saker.

The greatest problem, and probably the most difficult within the large-falcon group, is separating juveniles of Saker and Lanner. Individual, and to some extent also geographical, variation often serves only to complicate the issue further. In most cases, provided that reasonably close and lengthy views are obtained, it should be possible to identify the two species by a combination of the following characters:

1. *Shape and flight action* See above.

2. *Head pattern* Although the two species are generally similar, Saker *usually* has a whiter crown, typically with fewer and more evenly spaced dark streaks

(Lanner has buffish crown with more irregular and diffuse streaking, and intense forecrown and crown-side streaking, which on darker individuals may create horseshoe shape); whiter, broader and longer supercilia meeting on nape and extending forwards to merge with larger white area on forehead (Lanner's more buffish, narrower and clearly shorter supercilia do not join with pale forehead as dark of forecrown meets black eye-stripe, and short dark lateral crown-stripe behind eye causes supercilium to fade at mid-crown); rather broad but less pronounced eye-stripe fading in front of and just behind eye, forming diffuse smudgy area on lores, but much darker upper rear stripe and rear patch on ear-coverts (Lanner's eye-stripe slightly narrower, but usually darker and solid for most of its length, including before eye); rather poorly defined moustache, usually broken below eye (on Lanner, normally darker, more solid, and joins with eye-stripe below eye). Note that differences in prominence of eye-stripe and moustache cause dark eye to stand out on Saker, but not so on Lanner.

3. *Upperparts and upperwings* Most juvenile and first-winter Saker Falcons have a variable soft greyish-tawny cast to mantle, scapulars and much of coverts, with rather striking yellowish rufous-brown feather margins visible at close range, and contrastingly darker flight feathers and primary coverts, producing effect of paler arm and darker hand, and, except at longer ranges, show slightly darker primary tips and rather marked darker feather bases to greater coverts and as a row on outer scapulars (Lanner has darker slate-brown ground colour with only narrow pale rufous edges which may produce rufous cast when fresh, but, as early as autumn, bleaching creates slightly more grey-brown general tone, thus usually lacks Saker's contrasts, though outer half of hand often appears darkest). Note that, on heavily worn or bleached Sakers, contrast and rufous-yellow colour can be rather obscure. (In addition, note that upperparts of some early-moulted Lanners may have new, adult-like, barred feathers, never shown by 'normal' Sakers.)

4. *Underwing pattern* Saker has paler primaries below, with narrower and less complete dark bars than generally shown by Lanner and, especially, a translucent or silvery-whitish basal and central area which contrasts strongly with the greyer secondaries and with the more sharply defined dark primary tips (contrasts minimal or indistinct on Lanner), producing a stronger pattern; its underwing-coverts tend to be uniform in pattern, with whitish restricted to the feather margins and thus producing prominent longitudinal streaking (instead of Lanner's more spot-like pattern), but overlap occurs and both species can have all-dark or pale-mottled coverts.

5. *Underparts* Both species vary considerably in the amount, distribution and shape of underpart streaking, but juvenile (as well as adult) Saker tends to be darker on breast centre, flanks and trousers, where dark streaks broaden and often coalesce to produce more solid pattern, even creating all-dark trousers ('normal' Lanner more evenly and often more densely streaked, but has buffish thighs only faintly streaked, and some individuals which have moulted early may show hint of flank barring, which 'normal' Saker never does; also, unlike Saker's more extensive and looser streaking distally, that of Lanner tends to show more abrupt ending, thus leaving wider and better-demarcated area unstreaked). Note that Sakers with the darkest breast normally also show

all-dark underwing-coverts, whereas palest individuals with least dark on breast also have pale-mottled lesser and median underwing-coverts with darker greater-covert band.

6. *Tail pattern* Variable and rather similar on both species, with central rectrices uniform grey-brown, though sometimes with small buffish spots; on rest of tail, Saker tends to have bars more oval-shaped or rounded and more restricted to, and prominent on, inner webs (on Lanner, bars more linear and more evenly distributed on both webs and the entire tail).

7. *Leg colour* Most Sakers retain bluish-grey juvenile leg colour for almost one year and often longer (on Lanner, legs often become gradually more yellowish, or yellowish-green, during first winter, and even more so in first summer).

Lanner Falcon

Main confusion species: Saker Falcon, mainly in immature plumages (see Saker Falcon).

Structure, silhouette and jizz

Moderately large to large in size, but similar to Gyr and Saker Falcons in general proportions and build. Long-winged appearance closer to Saker, but arm relatively somewhat shorter and hand long and tapering, and also has Saker's smallish head and elongated body shape, but without that species' broad-chested appearance. Wings, while still narrower and longer, usually appear larger in relation to body, thus more kestrel-like when seen head-on; tail always rather long and noticeably narrow, especially at base. When perched, looks more slender-bodied and smaller-headed than Saker, and with minimal tail projection (a fraction longer on juveniles) as wingtips fall level with or only 1-2 cm short of tail tip (about 5 cm short on Saker).

Differs from Peregrine and Barbary Falcons in having a narrower body (lacking those species' characteristic bulkiness, with bull-neck and big head), a slimmer and marginally longer tail, and narrower, longer and less pointed wings.

Flight behaviour

Lanner's long, blunt-tipped wings and longish body produce a more elegant and graceful flight, combining Saker's easy manoeuvrability ('hands doing all the work') with a lighter and faster action, leading to greater agility. Compared with Peregrine and Barbary, Lanner Falcon is slower and heavier in flight, with less powerful and stiff action. Its normal flight is relatively slow, with wingbeats rather flat and not too deep, but when taking prey in the air it accelerates very rapidly with deeper beats, though still at low level (capable of stooping). Often soars with wingtips slightly upturned, but not so sharply bent as those of Saker and Gyr Falcons.

Plumage

Three races occur in the West Palearctic. Race *feldeggii* of southeast Europe and Turkey is the largest and the darkest, being dark grey-brown and well

barred above, with heavily streaked deep rufous crown (crown occasionally fully streaked or even uniformly dark grey), and well-barred trousers. Northeast African and Middle Eastern *tanypterus* is paler brownish-grey and less barred above, with crown duller rufous with narrower streaking, and has reduced barring on thighs and flanks. Race *erlangeri* of northwest Africa is the smallest and palest, and the least patterned below. Nevertheless, geographical differences, especially those between the North African and Middle Eastern races, often merge, and by no means all individuals are identifiable to subspecies.

Given reasonable views, ageing is not too difficult, at least when compared with ageing of Saker, although individual variation is considerable. Juveniles in North Africa and, particularly, the Middle East average paler on crown, but more heavily and broadly streaked below and with darker upperparts, and their tail pattern tends somewhat towards that of Saker (reduced and more broken bars).

ADULT Specifically identified and aged by buffish to rufous crown with fewer and narrower streaks than juvenile, and clear-cut black eye-stripe, forecrown and moustache; upperparts with greyish cast and variably barred. Underparts whiter and with rather regular but sparse dark spots on chest, markings becoming variably shaped transverse spots and bars on flanks and, to some extent, on underwing-coverts (mostly greaters, forming shadow effect of a dusky central underwing band); wings have fairly distinct dark trailing edge and tip. (On older adults, underwing can look very pale and plain but for darker wingtips and hint of greater-covert band.) The pale grey to creamy-grey tail, with rather fine, regular dark bars visible at closer ranges, generally appears the palest part of the bird's upper surface.

Despite its barred upperparts and flanks, adult Lanner should be distinguishable from any plumage of Gyr Falcon by clear differences in size and structure, head pattern and other plumage features (see under juvenile Gyr); also readily separated from similar Saker (though beware '*saceroides*' type) by patterns of head, underparts and underwing and by shape (see under adult Saker). Although pattern of upperparts may appear rather similar to that of Peregrine Falcon, Lanner is normally not difficult to separate from any plumage of latter by combination of flight silhouette and patterns of head, tail, underparts and underwing.

In Middle East and North Africa, adult Lanner is often confused with superficially similar adult Barbary Falcon; both appear rather greyish-blue above, and Barbary's smaller size can be difficult to judge. Nevertheless, adult and most first-summer Barbary Falcons can be eliminated by their more bulky-looking body, rather short and more pointed wings, and proportionately shorter but clearly broader tail which does not taper slightly towards base, their big-headed and bull-necked appearance, and their rather fitful Peregrine-like flight action without Lanner's shallow, flexible, more kestrel-like beats. Barbary differs further in its two-toned tail, with darker terminal band or distal half, and its more hooded appearance, with uniformly dark crown and paler rufous nape (never with Lanner's darker forecrown or darker nape), ill-defined or non-existent eye-stripe and broader moustache; it is also predominantly pale buff or light rufous below with finer spotting and barring, and it shows a dark

carpal crescent on an otherwise more uniform underwing which lacks Lanner's dark trailing edge and has a less extensive dark area at wingtip.

JUVENILE Aged by bare-part colours; dark streaking on underparts; usually dark central underwing-coverts contrasting with paler remiges; darker, unbarred and more uniform upperparts and upperwings; yellowish-buff to whitish-buff and almost fully dark-streaked crown; and broadly white-tipped but less regularly barred tail, with largely unmarked central feathers. Note that juveniles quite often moult as early as their first autumn or winter, acquiring a somewhat more adult-like head pattern and some barred feathers above and below, with legs more yellowish.

Although juvenile Lanner's uniformly dark upperparts and fairly evenly streaked underparts are not unlike those of juvenile Peregrine and Barbary Falcons, Lanner should be distinguishable from both species by the same structural and plumage features—chiefly underwing, head and tail patterns—as those which separate Saker and Peregrine (see Saker Falcon); note, however, that occasional juvenile Lanners show little contrast between underwing-coverts and flight feathers, and are thus closer to Peregrine and Barbary. For separation of juvenile Lanner from any plumage of Gyr and Saker, see those two species.

Peregrine Falcon

Main confusion species: Barbary Falcon (see pages 31-35); in the case of immatures, also Gyr, Saker and Lanner Falcons (see those species).

Structure, silhouette and jizz

Medium-sized but noticeably powerful and stocky, with temperamental action (see below). Often appears rather large and bulky-bodied, with heavy-chested and bull-necked shape. Wings typically broad-based, with long hand tapering to distinctly pointed wingtip, commonly flexed at carpal to form triangular shape; tail proportionately short, broad-based and square-cut. When perched, looks compact, with stout body, and head hunched into shoulders; wingtips fall level with or slightly short of tail tip.

Females are considerably larger and heavier than males. In flight, female's hand looks fuller and wingtip blunter than on male, which is by comparison narrower-winged and shorter-tailed, these differences between the sexes being obvious in soaring flight.

Flight behaviour

Exceptionally strong, swift and agile flier. Stiff but shallow wingbeats relieved by short glides, but generally rather slow action; suddenly accelerates when hunting, making fast and deeper beats, usually fairly high up, to perform dashing stoop with closed wings on to mostly aerial prey. When soaring, wings held level or with slightly upturned hands, and tail usually half-spread.

Plumage

Three rather distinct races in the West Palearctic. Adult *calidus* breeding east

of Lapland is generally similar to adult nominate *peregrinus* of North and Central Europe and northwest Russia, but differs on average in being larger, with paler greyish-blue upperparts, larger white cheek patch owing to narrower moustache, and less heavily barred underparts; juvenile *calidus* sometimes distinguished from nominate by its larger size, less heavily and more narrowly streaked underparts, paler upperparts with more pronounced whiter forehead, supercilium and nape spot, and narrower moustache, but some nominate *peregrinus* are similar. Adult *brookei* of the Mediterranean east to the Caucasus is distinctly smaller than either of the more northerly races, and usually easily distinguished by its more rufous (pinker) and heavily barred underparts and darker upperparts, with variable rufous nape patch, but smaller cheek patch; juvenile often identifiable by its more densely streaked underparts and by the more rufous or paler area on the nape. The species can be aged by the following characters.

ADULT Has complete slate-blackish bonnet (on some *brookei*, slightly broken on nape) with thick solid moustache, and dark slate-grey upperparts with bluish or (*brookei*) brownish tinge and often diffuse bars; uppertail-coverts and tail base paler than rest of upperparts, this often a useful feature for identifying both age and species at long range. Cheeks, throat and upper breast are plain whitish, most extensively so on males, with rest of underparts white to light rufous-tinged with fine, dense barring, often becoming fine spots in central parts of underbody. Tail as mantle and back but more conspicuously barred, bars becoming darker and broader on distal half. Bare parts mainly yellow.

Readily separated from any Saker or Lanner (see pages 24-30), but Peregrine Falcons of the large race *calidus* show some similarity to dark grey Gyr Falcon (compare latter). In south of region, however, *brookei* is easily confused with Barbary Falcon; see Barbary for detailed distinctions.

JUVENILE Underparts buffish with prominent dark streaks, but some wedge-shaped bars or blotches on flanks, trousers and undertail-coverts; upperparts browner and more uniform than on adult, with thin pale fringes. Head pattern as adult's, but paler; some *calidus* have more 'open' bonnet with longer, narrower moustache, larger pale areas on cheek, forehead and nape, and even a diffuse pale supercilium and trace of slightly darker eye-stripe, as well as variable crown streaking. Tail as adult's, but browner and, from below, more clearly barred, and with distinct pale terminal band (but this usually disappears with wear by first spring). Bare parts mainly dull bluish-green or grey, becoming yellow during first autumn.

Juvenile Peregrine could be confused with any one of the four other species of large falcon (see other texts); structure, head pattern and underwing pattern are the best characters. Separation from juvenile Barbary Falcon is extraordinarily difficult.

Barbary Falcon

Main confusion species: Peregrine Falcon, mainly of race *brookei* and immatures (see below).

Structure, silhouette and jizz

This species is essentially a marginally smaller version of Peregrine Falcon: while usually rather obviously smaller than nominate Peregrine and noticeably smaller than *calidus*, its size closely approaches that of Peregrine of race *brookei*, with which it also shares many plumage characteristics. Powerful-looking and with structure much as that of Peregrine, but less heavy in build, with narrower arm and proportionately slightly longer tail; these minor differences in relative proportions are, however, usually difficult to judge, and reliable identification is better based on plumage features. Females much larger than males.

Flight behaviour

Similar to Peregrine, but smaller size results in faster flight action in comparable situations. Flight very strong and direct, with rapid but shallow beats, largely of outer wing, and very short glides. When hunting, wingbeats clearly quicker than Peregrine's, but foraging methods similar; small male Barbary Falcon in hunting flight can strongly recall Merlin *F. columbarius*, with rapid beats and sudden changes of direction. Glides and soars as Peregrine; when soaring, may also hold both arm and hand slightly raised in a very shallow V.

Plumage

In plumage, as in other parameters, Barbary Falcon is very similar to Peregrine of the race *brookei*, and the following text therefore concentrates on these two taxa. In some areas of range overlap, and especially in Morocco, there is even evidence of a 'switching of characters' between the two, with Barbary showing more fully barred underparts and a Peregrine-like bonnet and *brookei* taking on Barbary-like characters. Regardless of whether Barbary is a full species or not, it is distinctive and recognisable in the field (see Clark & Shirihai 1995).

ADULT Age distinctions as for Peregrine. Although adult Barbary Falcons exhibit considerable individual variation, most show the following characters, which are the most important in separating them from adult Peregrines of the race *brookei*:

1. *Head pattern* Although it can be rather indistinct on more fully hooded individuals, Barbary Falcon always has some buffish on forehead, the pale forehead being very obvious on paler-headed and variegated individuals, which usually also show a variable rufous supercilium, lacking on some dark individuals, and a better-developed rufous, collar-like nape patch (*brookei* never has buff on forehead, though bleached or moulting near-adult may occasionally show a trace of paleness, while rufous supercilium is never found on adult *brookei*, and rufous nape, if present, is duller and more restricted, but occasionally extends onto lower crown as on many Barbary); Barbary's moustache is long and narrow and, importantly, its cheek patch is therefore much larger and more square-cut, sometimes extending 0.5-1.0 cm below eye (*brookei* has very broad moustache, often almost covering cheek area), and usually is also larger than on adult nominate Peregrine, but quite similar to

that of *calidus* (although both these races of Peregrine are usually clearly larger, predominantly black-hooded, and have underparts white and fully barred).

2. *Underparts* Very variable: most Barbary Falcons are washed orangey rufous-buff below, the tone varying from strong to duller, with dark barring chiefly on flanks and short streaks and spots mostly on lower breast and belly, although these markings can be rather obscure; rarely, underparts are more completely barred (as on *brookei*, but that has more pinkish ground colour and bars usually broader).

3. *Underwing* Barbary's diagnostic isolated dark crescent on greater primary coverts and its more distinct and more extensively darker wingtip on an otherwise paler underwing are useful pointers at longer ranges, while at close quarters underwing-coverts show variable buff wash and paler, finer and reduced barring, and inner webs of primaries show generally larger whitish or, often, buffish bars which tend to reach feather edges (on most Peregrines, pale bars smaller and do not reach edges of inner webs; on all adult Peregrines, greater primary coverts do not contrast with rest of underwing, on which coverts are whiter and dark area at wingtip is smaller and more diffuse).

4. *Upperparts* Barbary's paler blue-grey upperparts and upperwing-coverts contrast more with darker hands and distal half of tail (adult Peregrine clearly darker slate-grey or blackish grey-blue, with tips to flight and tail feathers less contrasting).

5. *Tail pattern* On Barbary Falcon, two or three distal tail bands tend to be darker and more sharply defined, and to become progressively broader and blacker towards tip, often producing a broad subterminal band that stands out well against distinctly pale lower back to basal half of tail or against buffish tail tip, the pattern being more obvious from above; note, however, that both species vary individually, and occasional Peregrines can be confusingly similar.

Apart from its similarity to Peregrine Falcon, Barbary's upperparts can appear very similar to those of Lanner, leading to possible confusion between the two (see Lanner Falcon).

JUVENILE Barbary and Peregrine Falcons in juvenile plumage are extremely similar, with a high degree of overlap in features; some individuals even show characters intermediate between the two. Very close and careful observation is required to evaluate the following fine differences; only those birds showing good development of typical features suggesting one of the two species should be identified, while a few must be consigned to the category of 'undetermined'.

Both Peregrine and Barbary Falcons exhibit strong sexual size dimorphism: since juvenile *brookei* is the closest in size to juvenile Barbary but the most different in plumage (head, underparts), while juvenile *calidus* is much larger than Barbary but somewhat closer in plumage, it would appear that the trickiest Peregrines are small male *calidus*, which could be taken for large female Barbary. Differences are as follows:

1. *Head pattern* Most Barbary Falcons have a less hooded appearance, with better-developed rufous or buff forehead and supercilia, the latter more or less meeting in a V on nape, and have a distinctly narrower dark moustache, but a much larger and unstreaked or virtually unstreaked cheek patch covering entire ear-coverts and even meeting with rufous of nape and almost reaching eye level, and a fairly pronounced blacker eye-stripe (Peregrine, especially the smaller *brookei*, tends towards a more complete hood with much smaller pale forehead patch, indistinct or non-existent supercilium and therefore obscure eye-stripe, smaller and darker nape patch, and much broader moustache and correspondingly smaller cheek patch, which is usually streaked; beware, however, that Peregrines of race *calidus* can have a more 'open-hooded' appearance approaching that of Barbary, with rather marked supercilium and large cheek patch, and these, especially small males, can be inseparable from Barbary by head pattern, but usually show paler underparts with coarser breast streaking than latter).

2. *Underparts* Compared with Peregrine Falcon, though less so with race *calidus* of latter, Barbary has obviously narrower, finer and less dense markings below, with thin streaks forming clear and well-spaced long lines (Peregrine more densely marked with more rounded and broader streaks which do not form lines); also has reduced flank barring, usually concealed beneath wing when perched (obvious on perched Peregrine), with thighs finely streaked and usually lacking Peregrine's prominent hook-shaped or arrowhead marks.

3. *Underwing* Juvenile Barbary and Peregrine Falcons generally have more or less identical underwing patterns. Barbary's underwing tends to appear a shade paler, as pale bars on both remiges and coverts average slightly broader, while its lesser coverts are more loosely barred but also streaked and spotted (unlike most Peregrines); it also lacks the contrast between paler primaries and slightly darker secondaries shown by most Peregrines, has more even secondary barring (Peregrine has darkish, incompletely pale-barred distal secondaries), and has a more pronounced dark wingtip. All of these differences are, however, often difficult to assess with any degree of accuracy in the field.

4. *Upperparts* Barbary tends to be a shade paler and browner, as the ground colour averages browner and the rufous margins on coverts, mantle and back slightly broader, while its darker upper-mantle patch generally stands out more against surroundings. Both species, however, show much individual variation, rendering these features of little use, especially when comparing Barbary with paler *calidus* Peregrine.

5. *Tail pattern* Variable, with much overlap between the two species; compared with the average Peregrine, however, most Barbary Falcons show a more obviously darker central feather pair, with pale bars rather diffuse or incomplete, and a more prominent subterminal band, as dark distal bands average darker and broader, with intervening pale band narrower and often less clear-cut.

6. *Bare-part colour* Juvenile Barbary tends to acquire stronger yellow pigment in bare parts earlier, a few being adult-like even as early as September, but in

both species development of bare-part colours varies individually and geographically (correlated with timing of breeding) and can be similar on both.

Finally, although Barbary Falcon has a rather 'open' bonnet and can therefore resemble juvenile Lanner, it is still distinguishable from latter by the same characters as those that separate juvenile Peregrine from Saker and Lanner, as outlined under Saker Falcon.

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CONSERVATION RESEARCH NEWS

Compiled by Mark Avery

This feature, contributed by the RSPB's Research Department, reports the most interesting recent scientific news relevant to the conservation of Western Palearctic species.

Raptors diminish 'glories' of Twelfth

A unique five-year study of the effects of raptor predation on Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* populations—carried out by Dr Steve Redpath, of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (ITE), and Dr Simon Thirgood, of The Game Conservancy Trust (GCT)—has just been published. It involved six Scottish grouse moors, but the most detailed work was at Langholm on the estate of the Earl of Dalkeith, and was funded by Lord Dalkeith, ITE, GCT, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the RSPB, Scottish Natural Heritage, the GCT Scottish Research Trust and a neighbouring landowner.

The study was made possible because the estates taking part put strenuous efforts into ensuring that raptors were not persecuted on their land during the study. This enabled the researchers to examine both the response of raptor populations to the cessation of local persecution and also the effects on Red Grouse population levels and shooting bags. The sample of moors able to meet the no-persecution criterion, and which could therefore be included, was small and not necessarily representative.

Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* and Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* were studied. Their breeding numbers increased on the range of moors, but particularly dramatically at Langholm, where Hen Harrier numbers increased from two breeding females in 1992 to 14 in 1996. Peregrine Falcons also increased in number; again most dramatically at Langholm, where their numbers increased from three pairs to five or six pairs. Numbers of raptors using the moors in winter also increased. So, the first finding of the study is that, when protected from illegal persecution, raptor numbers increase, sometimes very dramatically. This tends to confirm what conservationists have always maintained, and which has been supported by recent studies of Hen Harriers (*Brit. Birds* 90: 411-412), that illegal persecution of raptors seriously depresses their population levels, at least in some areas.

The most important factors which seem to determine the population level reached in unpersecuted raptor populations are the availability of nest sites (for Peregrine Falcons) and food. The availability of small birds (Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* especially) and small mammals, rather than the densities of Red Grouse, appears to determine Hen Harrier breeding densities. In years and places with high vole (Microtinae) and pipit numbers, Hen Harrier numbers are also high. This is why Hen Harriers do so well in young forestry plantations.

Hen Harriers and Peregrines, however, also eat Red Grouse. At Langholm, in the years with high densities of raptors, losses of Red Grouse to raptors were large throughout the year. About 30% of Red Grouse present in autumn had been killed by raptors by the spring and a further 30% of the surviving adults were taken by raptors during the spring and summer. Both Hen Harriers and Peregrine Falcons took significant numbers of adult Red Grouse, but their relative impact is uncertain. About 37% of Red Grouse chicks were killed by raptors before they were full-grown. Nearly all of these were taken by Hen Harriers.

Did these high levels of loss lead to declines in Red Grouse populations? Spring numbers of Red Grouse did not decline during the study, so the report did not suggest that raptors were driving their prey numbers towards even local extinction. The post-breeding population did decline, however, and this is the portion of the population which provides birds for sport shooting on and after the 'Glorious Twelfth'. A further complication is that post-breeding population densities of Red Grouse on grouse moors show marked peaks and troughs at four-year to ten-year intervals (usually six years at Langholm). The post-breeding population density at Langholm appears to have become stuck at a level typical of the trough of the cycle ever since raptor numbers increased. The study clearly shows a significant impact of raptor predation on autumn grouse bags and

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thus demonstrates, at Langholm at least, a very real conflict between raptor conservation and the sport of driven grouse-shooting.

Towards the end of the study, when raptor numbers were at their highest, the grouse bags were pitifully small (<100 brace) compared with the numbers which might have been expected (>1,000 brace). To some extent, these very low bags were compensated for by higher-than-expected bags in the early years of raptor protection. During the whole period of raptor protection, total grouse bags at Langholm were 25-50% lower than would have been expected from grouse bags in previous cycles. The low Red Grouse bags are wholly explained by the observed losses of Red Grouse to raptors through the study. This provides very strong—virtually incontrovertible—evidence for a very significant reduction in Red Grouse bags at Langholm caused by raptor predation. In essence, raptors eat Red Grouse before grouse-shooters get the chance to shoot them.

But what of the other study areas? Initially, only one of these was an active grouse moor. At this moor, called Moor C in the report, raptor numbers increased during the study, but to much lower densities than at Langholm. This is thought to be because this moor is less rich in small birds and mammals than is Langholm. At Moor C, large numbers of grouse were shot in the last year of the study, showing that raptor conservation and viable driven grouse-shooting were compatible at that site.

Opinions on the acceptability of shooting as a sport will vary, but it has to be recognised that management of land for the purpose of shooting Red Grouse is a significant upland land use. Generally speaking, land managed for Red Grouse appears to provide good habitat for many other upland species (except raptors on land where they are persecuted). Waders such as Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, passerines such as Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* and Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*, and a range of other species probably benefit from the management regime of well-managed grouse moors, although hard evidence for this is remarkably scarce. The main alternative land uses—conifer afforestation and heavier grazing by sheep—are likely to provide less-valuable habitats for birds (although raptor persecution would be likely to be much lower in both habitats). Conservationists, therefore, whatever their views on the ethics of shooting, should recognise the difficulties facing upland landowners who wish to stick to the law and leave raptors to breed unmolested on their land, but who wish to shoot grouse, too.

How does this important study shed light on the past, present and future? So far as the past is concerned, grouse bags have been declining on many Scottish grouse moors for most of this century; they have at Langholm, too. This long-term decline cannot be anything to do with raptors, because raptors were heavily persecuted, and therefore absent from most of the relevant areas, during most of this period. In 1948-88, there was a 48% loss of heather cover at Langholm and a 1.3% per annum drop in grouse bags. It seems likely that the long-term decline in grouse bags, at Langholm and many other moors, is a simple consequence of habitat loss and degradation, probably due mainly to increasing sheep numbers. A very real issue, therefore, to be addressed in partnership with upland landowners, is the problem of overgrazing.

Turning to the present, if all other grouse moors are currently persecution-free, then there is nothing to concern their owners; the Langholm experience cannot apply to them. Landowners' concerns over the findings at Langholm (although not at Moor C) can be based only on a tacit admission that illegal raptor persecution is rife.

What of the future? If raptor persecution were to cease completely, then, in time, there might be other grouse moors which would resemble Langholm, with high raptor densities and low grouse bags, but also many which would be unaffected because they resembled Moor C. This work has not told us how many grouse moors would fall into each category or where they would be.

This study, and that by the RSPB on Hen Harrier persecution, provides much-needed scientific evidence on which to base discussions about the future management of upland Britain. It is no longer possible for upland-moor owners to dismiss the evidence of widespread illegal persecution of raptors. It also seems that past grazing levels influence the numbers of Hen Harriers which a moor might support. Conservationists must, however, accept that raptors at Langholm have reduced the levels of grouse bags, and would do so on some other moors if raptor persecution were to cease more widely in the uplands.

REDPATH, S. M., & THIRGOOD, S. J. 1997. *Birds of Prey and Red Grouse*. London.

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EUROPEAN NEWS

All records have been accepted by the relevant national rarities committee, unless marked by an asterisk(*).

Records are included only if they have been sent by the official national representative, each of whom is listed at the end of this report, or have been published in the relevant national journal (these sources are always acknowledged).

As well as covering the whole of Europe, records notified by the national representatives for adjacent countries within the Western Palearctic are also included.

This forty-second six-monthly report includes officially notified records from 38 countries.

These summaries aim to include *all* records of: (1) significant breeding-range expansions or contractions; (2) major irruptions of erupting species; (3) Asiatic vagrants; (4) Nearctic species (excluding ducks, waders and gulls in Great Britain and Ireland, where they are regular); (5) other extralimital vagrants; and (6) major national rarities, including the first five national records even if the species is common elsewhere in Europe.

Unless otherwise stated, all records refer to nationally accepted records of single individuals.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*
GREAT BRITAIN Census: 855 breeding pairs and an additional 1,295 adults located, total population estimated at 3,010 adults, including 935 breeding pairs (*Bird Study* 44: 194-205).

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*
IRELAND Third record: North Slob, Co. Wexford, on 2nd January 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 447).
NETHERLANDS First record: Akersloot, Noord-Holland, on 19th-21st April 1997.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*
ICELAND Fourth record: 29th October 1995 (*Bliki* 18: 28).

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*
FRANCE Influx: about 600 in winter 1995/96, at least double mean numbers, with main influx in second half of February and first half of March 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 41-43).

Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris*
IRELAND Vagrant: Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 2nd May 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 449).

Yellow-nosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos*
NORWAY First record: at 64°28'N 09°45'W on 13th April 1994 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 266-267).

Madeira / Soft-plumaged / Cape Verde Petrel *Pterodroma madeira/mollis/feae*
AZORES Second record: 35°07'N 22°37'W on 17th August 1996.
IRELAND Vagrants: Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 27th July 1995, Bridges of Ross, Co. Clare, on 25th August 1995 and Brandon Point, Co. Kerry, on 26th August 1995 (seven previous records; *Irish Birds* 5: 449).
ISRAEL Vagrant: Eilat on 25th March 1997*.

Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*
FRANCE Fifth record: off Sète, Hérault, on 19th May 1997*.

Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*
SPAIN Overwintering: recent counts show that almost whole population, some 8,000-11,000 individuals, stays from November to February along coasts of Catalonia and Valencia (*Ardeola* 42: 161-166).

Balearic/Levantine Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus/yelkouan*
GERMANY Third to fifth records: Heligoland on 30th August 1995, 31st August 1995 and 24th September 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 159).

European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*
FINLAND First and second records: Tuusula, near Helsinki, on 15th January 1996, and

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Tervola, near Kemi, on 16th November 1996 (both individuals in weak condition, died on following day).

Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*
MOROCCO Unusually large numbers: along north Atlantic coast in late December 1996, including 1,454 individuals flying northwest during 2½-hour seawatch off Larache and several flying nearby in lower Loukkos valley up to 17 km inland on 24th.

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*
GREAT BRITAIN Census: in Scotland, 12 colonies totalling 167,407 occupied sites in 1994-95, revealing an increase of an average of 2.4% p.a. since 1984-85 (*Scot. Birds* 19: 10-27).

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*
IRELAND First record: Claddagh, Co. Galway, from 18th November 1995 to 6th January 1996 (*Irish Birds* 5: 436-439, 450).

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*
BULGARIA Census: 210 at main breeding area, Tyulenovo, Dobrich Region, and near Kaliakra Cape on 12th February 1997 (*Za Ptitzite* 1: 13).
FINLAND Fourth record: Tunnholmen, near Porvoo, on 23rd May 1996.

White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*
PORTUGAL First record (but origin uncertain): immature, probably third-year, Lagoa de Santo André, Setúbal, on 19th August 1995, and one almost certainly the same bird at Estuário do Tejo, Lisboa, on 8th October 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 7).
SPAIN Fifth record (vagrant/escape): 4th August 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 121).
SWITZERLAND Presumed escape: 23rd August 1996 (one previous record this century; *Orn. Beob.* 94: 205).

Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*
DENMARK Highest-ever numbers: 192-231 booming males in 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 10).

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*
MALTA First breeding records: pair raised broods of three and five at is-Simar Nature Reserve in 1997.
NORWAY Fourth and fifth records: 11th June 1993 and 6th-7th September 1994 (*Brit. Birds* 87: 3; 88: 264; *Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 267).

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
HUNGARY Fifth record: 7th-9th June 1989 (*Aquila* 102: 203).
SPAIN Continuing range expansion: first colony in Northern Meseta established since 1993 at Coreses, Zamora province (*Ardeola* 43: 241).

Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*
FRANCE Summering: two adults in Camargue during July 1997* at least (breeding with Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* possible).
PORTUGAL First record: dark morph at Castro Marim, Faro, on 18th May 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 7).

Great White Egret *Egretta alba*
AUSTRIA Record breeding numbers: at least 737 pairs in Lake Neusiedl/Burgenland in 1997.
BELARUS Second and third breeding records: single pair breeding in colony of Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* in Pinsk district and eight pairs breeding in colony of Grey Herons and Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* in Luninets district, both in Brest region, in 1997 (first was in 1994).
GERMANY High numbers: over 172 records in 1995 (cf. 295 records in previous 18 years; *Limicola* 11: 161-165).
LATVIA Male paired with female Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* on Lake Engure, Talsi, in summer 1997 and successfully reared four hybrid young (plate 4, on page 56).
POLAND First breeding record since 1863: three pairs (one nest with eggs) at Biebrza Marshes in May 1997.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
GREAT BRITAIN Highest-ever breeding numbers: total in England and Wales increased to over 7,100 pairs in 1995, the highest estimate in the 68 years of the BTO's Heronries Census (*BTO News* 205: 9).
LATVIA See Great White Egret *Egretta alba*.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*
UKRAINE Census: 490-560 pairs in mid 1990s (*Proc. Ukrainske Orn. Tovarystvo* 1: 208-215).

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*
CZECH REPUBLIC Best-ever years: totals of 853 occupied nests, with 2,116 young reared from 716 nests in 1994, and 796 occupied nests, with 1,703 young reared from 635 nests in 1995 (cf. *Brit. Birds* 88: 27).
DENMARK Census: six pairs fledged 11 juveniles in 1995 (cf. six pairs with 19 juveniles in 1994; *DOFT* 91: 11).
NETHERLANDS Census: 224 pairs in 1994.
SPAIN Winter census: 7,594 during early

1995, most in southwest (51% in Guadalquivir marshes, 28% in Extremadura region; *La Garcilla* 96: 42-43).

Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumeniferus*
PORTUGAL First record: ringed individual (probable escape) at Cachopos, Estuário do Sado, Setúbal, from 17th October 1996 to at least 15th February 1997.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*
SPAIN Breeding records: four pairs raised nine young at Ebro Delta and seven pairs raised 17 young at Guadalquivir marshes in spring 1996 (*Ardeola* 43: 242).

Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*
CANARY ISLANDS Third and fourth records: five on Fuerteventura in April 1996 and two there in February 1997*.
SPAIN Second record (first for Peninsular Spain): 27th February and 16th-17th June 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 121).

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*
FRANCE New breeding site: five pairs at Orx, Landes, in 1997.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*
SPAIN Best-ever breeding season at Fuente de Piedra: more than 13,000 young fledged from 16,000 pairs in 1996 (*Medio Ambiente* 25: 18).

Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor*
SPAIN Third record (vagrant/escape): 17th February 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 121-122).

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*
GERMANY Presumed escapes: Niedersachsen on 15th May 1995 and three in Hessen on 4th June to 8th July 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 201).

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*
GERMANY First breeding records: first attempt, in 1994, failed, but in 1995 and 1996 two pairs bred successfully, and other adults also present (*Limicola* 11: 76-81).

Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*
SPAIN Wintering population decline: from about 6,000 during 1960s to just 21 in 1996 (*Quercus* 129: 35-38).

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*
UKRAINE Presumed escapes: flock of nine in Rozdilna on 2nd April 1994, assumed to originate from Askaniya-Nova Zoo (*Proc. Ukrainske Orn. Tovarystvo* 1: 220).

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*
HUNGARY First record: adult at Fertőújlak from 7th February to 2nd April 1997.
SPAIN Third record: 26th November 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 122).

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*
BELARUS Second record: two in River Pripyat floodplain on 20th March 1997 (first was in 1988).
BULGARIA First record: adult with about 830 White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons*, 45 Red-breasted Geese *B. ruficollis* and eight Greylag Geese *A. anser* near Durankulak Lake on 15th March 1997 (*Za Ptitzite* 1: 13).

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*
ICELAND Fourth record of Nearctic race *nigricans*: 25th April 1995 (*Bliki* 18: 29).

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*
SPAIN Fourth record: 21st-22nd January 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 124).

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*
NORWAY Influx: ten records involving 30 individuals in 1994 (cf. 46 previous records involving 59 individuals; *Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 269-270).

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
CZECH REPUBLIC Second breeding record: one pair reared one young near Mydlovary, southern Bohemia, on 16th June 1996.

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*
HUNGARY Second breeding record this century: successful for second consecutive year at Petohaza in 1997.
SPAIN Fifth record: 21st and 25th October 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 124).
SWITZERLAND Census and status: breeding first recorded in 1958 at Basle and regularly since 1974 near Solothurn; by summer 1995, naturalised lowlands population (almost exclusively below 500 m asl) estimated at about 200 individuals, including about 10-15 breeding pairs (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 53-62).
UKRAINE First breeding record in Western Ukraine: pair reared seven young at Cholhyni, Javoriv district, L'vov region, during July-August 1996.

American Wigeon *Anas americana*
FINLAND Vagrant: 15th May 1995 (17 previous records; *Alula* 3: 85).
ICELAND Vagrants: one overwintering from 1994 and one new individual in 1995 (*Bliki* 18: 29).
MOROCCO Fifth record: adult male at Sidi Bourhaba on 22nd December 1996*.

Falcated Duck *Anas falcata*
PORTUGAL First record (but origin uncertain): male in eclipse shot at Paul do Boquilobo, Santarém, on 25th December 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 7).

Gadwall *Anas strepera*
GREAT BRITAIN Record winter numbers: counts for the Wetland Bird Survey topped 10,000 for the first time in November/December 1994.

Common Teal *Anas crecca*
FINLAND Vagrant of Nearctic race *carolinensis*: 14th April 1995 (14 previous records; *Ahula* 3: 85).
GREAT BRITAIN Highest-ever numbers of race *carolinensis*: 38 in 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 418).
ICELAND Vagrant of race *carolinensis*: ten in 1995 (44 previous records; *Bliki* 18: 29).
NETHERLANDS Vagrants of race *carolinensis*: two during 6th-20th April 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 101).
PORTUGAL Third record of race *carolinensis*: 14th January to 3rd April 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 7).
SPAIN Vagrant of race *carolinensis*: 28th December 1994 to 18th February 1995, and, perhaps same, 28th December 1995 to 12th February 1996 (*Ardeola* 44: 124).

Black Duck *Anas rubripes*
CANARY ISLANDS First record: Tenerife from 5th January to 3rd April 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 124-125).
ICELAND Vagrants: two in 1995 (26 previous records; *Bliki* 18: 29-30).

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*
FINLAND Vagrants: 23rd-24th April 1995, 7th May 1995 and 27th-30th May 1995 (seven previous records; *Ahula* 3: 85).
GERMANY Vagrants: 5th May 1995 and 7th-10th May 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 168).
ICELAND Vagrant: 9th-15th October 1995 (eight previous records; *Bliki* 18: 30).
MOROCCO Vagrant: female at Sidi Bourhaba on 22nd December 1996* (11 previous records).
NETHERLANDS Vagrant: adult male on 18th February 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 101).
NORWAY Second record: 16th May 1994 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 270).
SWITZERLAND Third and fourth records: 6th-15th May 1996 and 26th & 29th June 1996 (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 195).

Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera*
SPAIN First record (escape/vagrant): 18th October to 3rd November 1994 (*Ardeola* 44: 124).

Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*
CANARY ISLANDS First recent breeding record: on Fuerteventura, seven adults and 18 downy young on 12th July 1997, pair with two young in August and total of 24 individuals in September.
GERMANY Presumed escape: 8th-9th August 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 203).
SWITZERLAND Presumed escapes: two on 5th-6th April 1996 (two previous records; *Orn. Beob.* 94: 205).

Redhead *Aythya americana*
GREAT BRITAIN First record: 8th-27th March 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 464).

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*
BELGIUM Vagrants: male at various sites from 17th November 1990 to 13th February 1994, and female on 2nd January 1993 and 21st October 1993 to 22nd April 1994 (five other records; *Aves* 33: 172-173).
GERMANY Vagrants: 13th-27th February 1995 and 27th April to 28th May 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 168).
ICELAND Vagrant: 9th-20th October 1994 (29 previous records; *Bliki* 18: 31).
NETHERLANDS Vagrants: adult males on 9th-17th April 1995 and 3rd May 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 101).
SPAIN Vagrants: two first-winter males and three females at Gozón, Asturias, from 31st October 1994 (see *Brit. Birds* 90: 82, where locality erroneously given as Avilés), with one female staying until 27th November and the two males and one female until 8th April 1995; adult male and two females at nearby Gijón, Asturias, from 26th December 1994 to 16th February, the two females perhaps coming from previous locality (*Ardeola* 44: 124-125).
SWITZERLAND Vagrant: female on 9th-13th April 1996, not 9th-21st as given in *Brit. Birds* 90: 82 (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 195).

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*
MOROCCO Second breeding record: female with seven young at Sidi Bourhaba in late April 1997 (first was at Lower Loukkos marshes, near Larache, 100 km farther north, in April 1991, *Brit. Birds* 85: 446).

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*
DENMARK Second record: female at Harboørc, W-Jutland, from 25th March to 16th April 1997*.
IRELAND Second record: Lough Neagh on 25th-26th March 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 454).
NETHERLANDS First record: 21st November 1994 to 21st June 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 18: 111; 19: 101).
PORTUGAL First record (but origin uncertain): male at Ílhavo, Aveiro, on 7th-15th December 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 8).
SWITZERLAND Presumed escape: 7th January to 9th March 1996 (three previous records involving one individual; *Orn. Beob.* 94: 205).

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*
NORWAY Third record: male at Bognelva, Alta, Finnmark, on 21st June 1991 (after reconsideration, only one record prior to 1986 is accepted, and the 1994 record, *Brit. Birds* 89: 250, becomes the fourth, not the seventh).

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*
BELARUS Fifth record and first in breeding season: Klichev district, Mogilev region, on 17th June 1996.

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*
FINLAND Vagrants: 1st May 1995, 23rd June 1995, 31st July 1995 (32 previous records; *Ahula* 3: 85).
GERMANY First this century: three at Westerheversand, Schleswig-Holstein, on 20th-24th December 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 169).
ICELAND Vagrant: 22nd July 1995 (26 previous records; *Bliki* 18: 31).
NORWAY Vagrants: two in 1993 and three in 1994 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 271).
SPAIN Vagrants: two, on 1st October 1995 and 19th November to 30th December 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 126).

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*
FINLAND First record of Siberian race *stejnegeri*: male at Kemio, southwestern Finland, from 27th May to 8th June 1996.
ICELAND First record of Nearctic race *deglandi*: adult male paired with nesting female Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* in northwest Iceland on 3rd June 1993 (*Bliki* 18: 31, 65-67).

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*
GERMANY Presumed escape: 25th May to 26th July 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 203).

Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*
GERMANY Presumed escapes: two, on 16th April to 7th May 1995 and 7th-21st May 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 203).

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*
GERMANY Presumed escapes: three, on 5th February to 4th March 1995, 30th April to 4th July 1995 and 8th-28th December 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 203).
NORWAY Deletion: report of 1st June 1986 (*Brit. Birds* 82: 15-16) no longer acceptable (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 296).

Smew *Mergellus albellus*
DENMARK Highest-ever numbers: over 800 at Bogo, Zealand, on 25th-27th January 1997.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*
GREAT BRITAIN Census total: about 2,600 pairs nested on rivers in Britain in 1987, and probably fewer than another 100 pairs at non-riverine sites (*Bird Study* 44: 1-12).
ITALY First breeding record: female with five ducklings about 50 days old at Lago del Corlo, Venetia, in early July 1996 (*Riv. Ital. Orn.* 66: 172, 207-210).

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*
ICELAND Status: ten individuals in 1995, but no breeding recorded (*Bliki* 18: 32).

White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*
GREECE Record numbers: 2,213 at Lake Vistonia on 15th January 1997.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*
DENMARK First record (presumed escape): Skagen, N-Jutland, on 1st-3rd June 1997*.

Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus*
EGYPT First record: Bir El Ambagi, 7 km west of Quseir, on 9th May 1996 (*Bull. African Bird Club* 4: 31).

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*
GERMANY Vagrant: Storbeck, Brandenburg, on 10th May 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 169).

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
IRELAND Fifth record: two localities in Co. Wicklow on 10th-11th April 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 456).

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*
BELARUS Third breeding record since 1950s: pair breeding near Grodno in mid June 1997 (previous records were in 1985 and 1994, *Brit. Birds* 89: 29).
SPAIN Steep decline on Menorca, Balearic Islands: only 12 pairs in 1995, compared with about 135 during 1980s (*Quercus* 121: 44).

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*
DENMARK Highest-ever autumn numbers: 62 during autumn migration, including 38 in Zealand (*DOFT* 91: 20).

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*
IRELAND First and second records: juvenile shot near Garrison, Co. Fermanagh, on 11th January 1973, previously accepted as White-tailed Eagle *H. albicilla*, but specimen re-examined, and juvenile caught near Castleisland, Co. Kerry, on 15th November 1987 (*Irish Birds* 5: 456).

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*
FRANCE Vagrant outside new breeding range in Alps: near Pontarlier, Doubs, on 18th June 1997. First breeding record in Haute-Savoie: one young reared in 1997, following

re-establishment project.
NETHERLANDS Vagrants from re-establishment scheme in Haute-Savoie, France: two first-summers, on 20th May 1997 and 25th-26th May 1997 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 121-123).

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*
FRANCE Influx outside breeding area: Dôle, Jura, on 11th May 1997*, 13 at Rocroi, Ardennes, on 27th May 1997, four in Plateau de Millevaches, Corrèze, at beginning of June 1997, and two in Marne département on 12th June 1997.

Monk Vulture *Aegypius monachus*
FRANCE Vagrant: Achouria, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, on 1st May 1997*. New breeding site: four pairs nested, unsuccessfully, in Cevennes in spring 1997*.

Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*
NORWAY First record: Aursnes-Gaddal, Ulstein, More og Romsdal, on 18th July 1988.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*
GREAT BRITAIN Declining nesting success: BTO has issued high alert owing to significant decline in clutch size over last 25 years and possible increases in rates of nest loss during incubation (*BTO News* 207: 5).

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*
SPAIN Population estimate: 3,600-4,600 breeding pairs (*Quercus* 121: 18-21).

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
SPAIN Third record: 14th November 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 127).

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*
SPAIN Second record: Ebro Delta on 17th January 1996 (*La Garcilla* 97: 46).

Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*
SPAIN Fifth record: 28th October to 17th November 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 127).

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*
UKRAINE Status: estimate of numbers falling to seven pairs in mid 1980s probably too pessimistic; over 50 pairs breeding in mid 1990s, and real number possibly about 75 pairs (*Proc. Ukrainske Orn. Tovarystvo* 1: 45-49).

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*
GERMANY First breeding record: pair reared two young in Sachsen-Anhalt in April-September 1995 (*Limicola* 10: 171-177; 11: 170).
NETHERLANDS Third record: 13th-21st & 26th July 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 100, 101, 170-176).

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*
DENMARK Below-average numbers in 1994. Deletion: influx of 475-490 in 1994, *Brit. Birds* 90: 83, related to Peregrine Falcon *F. peregrinus*.
FINLAND Influx: 32 in 1995, most in September (as good or better years only 1979, 1990, 1992 and 1993; *Alula* 3: 87). Massive invasion: 82, mostly juveniles, from 15th August to 22nd September 1996.

Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*
ITALY First record: Calabria, Strait of Messina, on 29th April 1995 (*Riv. Ital. Orn.* 66: 173).

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
FRANCE Range expansion: one pair nested successfully in Pas-de-Calais département in 1997.
HUNGARY First breeding record: Northern Hungary in 1997 (after being extinct for some 20 years).

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*
GREAT BRITAIN Loss of biomass: birds lost from the breeding population between 1976 and 1996 would together weigh over 200 tonnes (*BTO News* 210/211: 23).

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*
GREAT BRITAIN High numbers: 111 in 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 421).

Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*
FINLAND Fifth and sixth records: 12th June to 15th July 1995 and 14th June to 1st July 1995 (fourth was in 1989; *Alula* 3: 87).

Striped Crake *Porzana marginalis*
ITALY First record: Livorno on 4th January 1997, died on 5th*.

Corn Crake *Crex crex*
IRELAND Probable decrease: drop of about 24% between 1996 and 1997, with stabilisation in population of the Shannon Callows, but decreases in Donegal and Mayo (the Corncrake Conservation Project, operated by BirdWatch Ireland, with funding from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the RSPB and the EU LIFE Fund, involves payment of grants to farmers to delay the mowing of pastures until late in the season).

Allen's Gallinule *Porphyrula alleni*
PORTUGAL Second record: first-winter captured and ringed at Penamacor, Castelo Branco, on 8th January 1992, released at Lagoa de Albufeira, Setúbal, on 10th January (first was in April 1990, *Brit. Birds* 90: 83; *Pardela* 3(5): 8-9).

SPAIN Vagrant: 28th December 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 127).

Purple Swamp-hen *Porphyrio porphyrio*
MOROCCO Southward range extension: first breeding record at Sidi Bourhaba (c. 100 km south of nearest previous breeding site) on 25th April 1997.
SPAIN Successful re-establishment project: 60 breeding pairs at Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Natural Park, Girona (*La Garcilla* 97: 46).

Common Crane *Grus grus*
DENMARK Census: eight pairs with nine juveniles in 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 23).
UKRAINE Census: 490-560 pairs in mid 1990s (*Proc. Ukrainske Orn. Tovarystvo* 1: 192-200).

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*
FINLAND Vagrant: 16th-21st June 1995 (seven previous records; *Ahula* 3: 87).
HUNGARY Third record: 16th July to 19th September 1993 (*Aquila* 102: 204).
NETHERLANDS Second record: 1st May 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 102).

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*
FRANCE Census: 1,087-1,256 singing males in 1996 (cf. 1,247-1,398 in 1995), and 'species is on the verge of extinction in open cultivated plains of France' (*Ornithos* 4: 73-77).

Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata*
CANARY ISLANDS Census: estimate of 527 individuals, with 18 on Graciosa, 268 on Lanzarote and 241 on Fuerteventura, in November-December 1994 (*Ardeola* 44: 61-69).

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
ESTONIA First record: male at Tallinn on 11th May 1997*.
FINLAND Second record: Åland Islands on 5th-7th and 15th-16th September 1996.
NORWAY Fifth record: 8th May to 5th June 1993 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 274).

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
GREAT BRITAIN Record winter count: Wetland Bird Survey revealed 2,707 on English estuaries in November 1994.

Crab-plover *Dromas ardeola*
ISRAEL Third record: two at Ma'agan Mikhael on 20th July 1997 (previous records concerned two at Ma'agan Mikhael on 9th June 1987 and four at Eilat on 10th July 1987).

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*
PORTUGAL Fourth record: Luz, Lagos, Faro, on 9th June 1996.

Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*
BELARUS Third record: River Pripyat, near mouth of River Sluch, on 12th August 1996.
SWITZERLAND Second record: 29th-31st October 1995 (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 197).

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*
MALTA Third breeding record: pair at Ghadira Nature Reserve bred in spring 1997 for third successive year, rearing three young.

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*
AZORES Fourth record: adult in breeding plumage on 12th-13th August 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 8-9).

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*
CYPRUS Third record: 10th and 12th March 1995 (*Cyprus Orn. Soc. (1957) Ann. Rep.* 43: 71).

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
SPAIN Census: 154-177 breeding pairs on Mallorca, Balearic Islands in 1995 (*Annuari Ornitòlogic de les Balears* 10: 37-39).

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*
CYPRUS Status: 'seen in every month of the year in small numbers' in Paphos Lighthouse area, with '2 breeding reports' in July 1996, and records from nine other sites (*Cyprus Orn. Soc. (1957) Ann. Rep.* 43: 28).
GERMANY Third record: 14th-15th August 1995 (*Limicola* 9: 333; 11: 172).
HUNGARY Second record: male on Csaj-tó, Tömörkény, and then at Szeged, Fehér-tó, from 24th May to 10th June 1997*.

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*
CYPRUS Vagrants: 20th April 1987, 12th-13th April 1992 and 17th April 1996 (four other records).
GREAT BRITAIN Fifth record: 3rd-4th June 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 469, 473).

Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*
ITALY Second breeding record in Alps: pair raised at least three young on Val Federia, Lombardy, in 1994 (breeds irregularly in Apennines; first breeding in Alps was in 1978; *Riv. Ital. Orn.* 66: 3-8).

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*
AZORES Vagrant: adult on 9th-10th August 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 9).
CANARY ISLANDS Vagrant: Tenerife on 26th

October 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 127-128).
GERMANY Third record: 24th September 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 173).
ICELAND Vagrant: found dead on 1st October 1995 (eight previous records; *Bliki* 18: 34).
MOROCCO First record: first-summer at Oued Souss estuary on 24th-25th April 1997*.
NETHERLANDS Vagrant: adult on 16th-19th October 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 102).
NORWAY First record: adult male at Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard, on 12th July 1995 (previous records, *Brit. Birds* 81: 17; 86: 40; *Vår Fuglefauna* 10: 93; 11: 90, now rejected).
SPAIN Vagrant: 5th April 1994 (*Ardeola* 44: 128).

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*
BELGIUM First record: 16th September 1992 (*Aves* 33: 175; *Mergus* 10: 356-363; *Oriolus* 61: 31).
CYPRUS First record: August 1995 (*Cyprus Orn. Soc. (1957) Ann. Rep.* 43: 3).
FINLAND Unprecedented influx: 40 Pacific Golden Plovers and nine Pacific/American *P. dominica*, almost all juveniles, with maximum of three together, in autumn 1996 (23 individuals previously).
NETHERLANDS Vagrant: 13th-15th September 1991 (total now of 15 accepted records; *Dutch Birding* 19: 102).
SPAIN First record: 17th August 1980 (*Ardeola* 44: 127).

American/Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica/fulva*
FINLAND See Pacific Golden Plover, above.
NETHERLANDS Vagrant: 19th-20th August 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 102).
SPAIN Vagrant: 19th March 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 128).

Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*
AUSTRIA Third and fifth records: adult at Kalsdorf, Styria, on 24th October 1994 and male at River Thaya in Lower Austria on 13th April 1997 (record on 23rd March 1996, *Brit. Birds* 90: 242, becomes fourth).
GERMANY Vagrants: five in 1995, on 19th March to 2nd April, 14th-16th April, 21st-24th July, 12th September and 17th September (*Limicola* 11: 173).
HUNGARY Fourth record: adult in Hortobágy for about one month from 8th October 1996.
NETHERLANDS Vagrant: 8th-22nd July 1995 and 16th October 1995 (27 previous records; *Dutch Birding* 19: 102).
POLAND Vagrants: adult near Zielona Gora on 12th April 1997 and juvenile at Nyski Reservoir on 17th August 1997 (six previous records).
PORTUGAL First record: Lagoa de Santo André, Setúbal, on 21st-24th October 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 9).
SPAIN Vagrant: 15th March 1995 (five previous records for Peninsular Spain (and one for Canary Islands); *Ardeola* 44: 128). First record for Balearic Islands: Albufera Lagoon, Mallorca, on 3rd November 1996*.
SWITZERLAND Correction: vagrant noted in *Brit. Birds* (90: 242) was on 2nd April 1995, not 2nd August 1995 (*Orn. Beob.* 93: 334; *Nos Oiseaux* 44: 36).

White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*
CANARY ISLANDS First record: adult on Tenerife in November 1978*.
CYPRUS Vagrant: 7th March 1996 (*Cyprus Orn. Soc. (1957) Ann. Rep.* 43: 29).
DENMARK First record: Tisso, Zealand, on 13th-14th July 1997*, moving to nearby Borreby Mose from 15th July to 1st August 1997*.
FRANCE Second record: 19th-20th June 1996 (first was on 25th November 1840; *Ornithos* 4: 138).
POLAND Second record: adult near Wladyslawowo on 18th May 1997 (first was in April 1975).

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
AUSTRIA Census: 3,000-3,500 pairs in 1996.

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*
GREAT BRITAIN Second record: 13th October to 5th November 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 471).

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*
AZORES Vagrant: juvenile on 23rd August 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 9).
CANARY ISLANDS First and second records: juvenile on Tenerife in October 1995* and immature there in May 1997*.
MOROCCO First record: Oued Souss on 5th May 1995 (*Bull. African Bird Club* 4: 45-46).
NETHERLANDS Second record: 18th-19th July 1996 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 185-187).

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*
AZORES Vagrants: 9th-10th August 1995 and 23rd August 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 9).

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
CANARY ISLANDS Vagrants: five in October-November 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 128).
HUNGARY First record: adult near Dunatetétlen on 18th-24th May 1997*.
NORWAY Vagrants: 21st July 1993 and 5th-

7th August 1994 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 275).
SPAIN Vagrant: 20th July 1994 (*Ardeola* 44: 128).

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*
FINLAND Vagrants: 4th May 1995, 10th May 1995, 18th May 1995 and 21st-23rd May 1995 (33 previous records; *Alula* 3: 87).
GERMANY Vagrants: five in 1995, on 20th May, 21st-22nd May, 25th May, 27th August and 24th-27th September (*Limicola* 11: 173-174).
HUNGARY Vagrants: 11th September 1994 (11 previous records; *Aquila* 102: 204); juvenile at Fertoujlak on 15th-21st September 1996 and adult at Kis-kecskes, Hortobágy, on 18th September 1996.
ICELAND Vagrants: four in September-October 1995 (26 previous records; *Bliki* 18: 34).
NETHERLANDS Vagrants: adult from 29th July to 3rd August 1995 and juveniles on 5th-7th August 1995 and 7th-11th August 1995 (67 previous records; *Dutch Birding* 19: 102).
NORWAY Vagrants: 10th & 12th June 1993 and 23rd-28th October 1993 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 276).
PORTUGAL Vagrant: 13th October 1991 (*Ardeola* 44: 128).
SPAIN Vagrants: five records involving six individuals in May, July and September-October 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 128).

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*
FINLAND Probably largest-ever concentration: 1,400 in Liminka on 31st May 1997.

Stilt Sandpiper *Micropalama himantopus*
FRANCE Fifth record: adult at Penestin, Morbihan, on 26th July 1997*.
NORWAY Second record: 27th-30th May 1993 (not 26th-30th May 1993 as given in *Brit. Birds* 87: 7; *Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 276).

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*
CANARY ISLANDS Vagrant: 12th October 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 128).
GERMANY Vagrants: 5th September 1995 and 18th September 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 175).
NORWAY Vagrant: 25th September to 10th October 1994 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 276).
PORTUGAL Second record: juvenile on 22nd September 1994 (*Pardela* 3(5): 9-10).
SPAIN Vagrants: 4th September 1990, 13th October 1994, 21st-24th September 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 128).

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*
CANARY ISLANDS First record: adult from January to April 1986*.
MOROCCO Fourth and fifth records: individual, probably first-winter, at Oued Souss estuary on 21st November 1996* and summer-plumaged adult there during at least 22nd-26th April 1997*.
NETHERLANDS Vagrant: 26th-27th May 1995 (nine previous records; *Dutch Birding* 19: 102).
SPAIN Fifth and sixth records: 3rd-7th October 1995 and 14th-22nd October 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 128, 130).

Little Curlew *Numenius minutus*
FINLAND First record: juvenile on Åland Islands on 1st-2nd October 1996 (not just 1st October 1996 as given in *Brit. Birds* 90: 243).

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*
ITALY First breeding record: two pairs nested in Piedmont in 1996, after two pairs on territory in 1995 (*Riv. Ital. Orn.* 66: 173).

Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda*
NETHERLANDS First record: 28th October 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 100, 103).
NORWAY First record: about 22nd October to 9th November 1994 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 277).

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*
LATVIA Possible range expansion: pair near Lake Babite, Riga, Jelgava, in summer 1997 (regular breeding since 1974 only at Nagli, Rēzekne).

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*
SPAIN Third record (first for Balearics): Mallorca from 16th April to 29th June 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 130; *La Garcilla* 97: 46).

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*
AUSTRIA First record: Seewinkel Burgenland on 10th May 1997.
CANARY ISLANDS Vagrant: 12th-18th September 1995 and probably the same individual 19th-20th November 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 130).
NETHERLANDS Third record: 6th August 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 105).
NORWAY Vagrant: 1st July 1993 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 279).
SPAIN Vagrant: 30th April 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 130).

Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*
CHANNEL ISLANDS First record: juvenile at Rue des Bergers, Catel, during at least 17th-

26th August 1997.
ICELAND Third record: 19th-29th August 1995 (*Bliki* 18: 35, 36; *Brit. Birds* 89: 34).

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*
SWITZERLAND Fourth record: 22nd-29th September 1996 (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 129-131, 197).

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia*
AZORES Vagrant: 12th-15th August 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 10).
CANARY ISLANDS Vagrant: 11th November to 1st December 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 131).
MOROCCO Second record: Oued Souss on 5th May 1995 (*Bull. African Bird Club* 4: 45-46).
PORTUGAL First record: Estuário de Sado, Setúbal, from 4th January to 28th February 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 10).

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*
FINLAND Third record: Pori on 24th May 1997.
GREECE First record: Akrotiri, Crete, on 1st May 1996.
ICELAND Third record: 23rd September to 8th October and, presumed same, 14th October 1995 (*Bliki* 18: 36, 37).
NETHERLANDS Vagrant: 24th-25th June 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 105).
SPAIN Vagrant (and first record for Balearics): Mallorca on 2nd October 1985 (*Ardeola* 44: 131).

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*
DENMARK Highest-ever numbers: total of 737 in 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 27).

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*
CZECH REPUBLIC Third record: two adults near České Heřmanice, eastern Bohemia, on 13th April 1996 (second was in November 1995, *Brit. Birds* 90: 86).

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*
CZECH REPUBLIC Breeding expansion: single pairs near Hodonín, southern Moravia, and near Ostrava, northern Moravia, in 1995.
FRANCE Breeding summary: first bred, in Camargue, in 1965 and sporadically there until 1981, annually thereafter; total population estimated at 682-793 breeding pairs in 1996, of which 80-90% were in Camargue (*Ornithos* 4: 54-62).
IRELAND First breeding record: adult and subadult attending nest with four eggs in 80-pair colony of Black-headed Gulls *L. ridibundus* at Larne Lough, Co. Antrim, on 31st May 1995, but breeding failed, perhaps owing to predation (*Irish Birds* 5: 435-436).

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*
FINLAND First record: adult in Västanfjärd and Dragsfjärd, southwestern Finland, from 1st May to 22nd July 1997*.
GERMANY Presumed escape: juvenile in Niedersachsen on 18th August 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 204).
ICELAND Vagrant: 8th January 1995 (seven previous records; *Bliki* 18: 36).
PORTUGAL Second record: first-winter at Carcavelos, Lisboa, on 14th-21st January 1996.

Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*
FINLAND Fourth record: first-year in Asikkala, southern Finland, on 2nd November 1996.

Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*
ICELAND Vagrant: 9th-13th May 1995 (seven previous records; *Bliki* 18: 37).
PORTUGAL Vagrant: adult, Parede Beach, Lisboa, on 15th January 1995, presumed to be individual returning for sixth successive year (*Pardela* 3(5): 10).

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*
SPAIN Increase in wintering population: around Madrid, about 75,000 in 1993, compared with slightly more than 20,000 in 1979-80 (*Quercus* 124: 31-37).

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*
GERMANY Third record: two on 8th-11th May 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 179).
SWITZERLAND Second to fourth records: up to seven adults at Chablais de Cudrefin, Vaud, during 3rd-11th May 1997, 20 adults at Préverenges, Vaud, on 14th May 1997 and adult at Genève on 15th May 1997.

Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*
MOROCCO Increase in wintering population: along south Atlantic coast, 7,646 between Foum Assaka (c. 29°N) and Dakhla (c. 24°N), including 5,530 in single roost at Pointe d'Awfist on 13th January 1997. Inland record: two adults at Barrage Mansour Eddahbi, near Ouarzazate, on 20th April 1997.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*
CZECH REPUBLIC Third to fifth records: at least three (adult, immature and first-winter) in Tovačov and Záhlinice, central Moravia, in October-November 1995.
GERMANY Fifth and sixth records: 19th-25th January 1995 and 3rd June 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 180).
HUNGARY Deletion: record on 31st December 1994 (*Túzok* 1: 23; *Brit. Birds* 88: 273) now rejected.
ICELAND Vagrants: 7th May 1994, 14th May

1995 and 21st June 1995 (43 previous records; *Bliki* 18: 37).
MOROCCO Vagrants: 17th January 1995 (*Porphyrio* 8: 120), at Oued Sebou estuary on 18th October 1996, near Larache on 23rd December 1996, at Agadir on 18th-19th January 1997 and at Oued Souss estuary on 19th January 1997 (18 previous records; total now 23).
PORTUGAL Vagrants: first-winter on 24th-29th December 1995, joined by adult on last date (*Pardela* 3(5): 11).
SPAIN Vagrants: 13 individuals in winter 1994/95 (*Ardeola* 44: 131).

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans*
ICELAND First record: individual of race *michahellis* at Arnarnesvogur í Garðabæ, on 21st-24th April 1995 (*Bliki* 18: 37, 38).

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*
ITALY Fourth record: 22nd February 1987 (*Riv. Ital. Orn.* 66: 173).

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*
HUNGARY Fifth record: 25th March 1994 (*Aquila* 102: 206).

Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea*
ICELAND Vagrant: adult on 18th May 1995 (*Bliki* 18: 37).
SPAIN Second record: 17th-18th April 1994 (*Ardeola* 44: 132).

Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea*
ESTONIA First record: juvenile at Tallinn on 13th January 1996.
NETHERLANDS Third record: first-summer between Egmond and Bergen, Noord-Holland, on 17th May 1997*.

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*
DENMARK Breeding numbers: decline from 26-30 pairs during 1976-80 to average of 11 during 1981-96, with high of 19 in 1986 and low of two in 1991 (*DOFT* 91: 101-108).
ESTONIA First record: Puhtu, Lääne district, on 17th May 1997*.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*
BELARUS Third record since 1960s: Chervonoje Lake, Zitkovichi district, Gomel region, on 26th June 1997.

Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*
SPAIN Vagrant of African race *albidorsalis*: 20th August 1992 (*Ardeola* 44: 132-133).

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*
GERMANY First record: Bayern on 19th June 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 182).

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*
HUNGARY Third record: 23rd October 1994 (*Aquila* 102: 206).

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*
IRELAND Increases: 643 pairs breeding in Republic of Ireland in 1997, up from 563 in 1996; numbers at main colony on Rockabill increased to 598 pairs, although breeding success was low owing to adverse weather.

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*
SPAIN First record: Strait of Gibraltar on 27th October 1987 (*Ardeola* 44: 133).

Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*
NETHERLANDS Additional sighting: 3rd August 1989, but 'it is believed that all records from 1989 refer to no more than two birds' (cf. *Brit. Birds* 84: 7; *Dutch Birding* 19: 106).

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*
AUSTRIA First nesting since 1968: one breeding attempt in Seewinkel/Burgenland in 1996.
CHANNEL ISLANDS Second record: St Ouen's Pond, Jersey, on 19th and 20th May 1997 (first was on 6th-8th May 1989).

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
DENMARK Invasion: at least 2,000 from 13th May 1997, with the majority on 13th-15th May. Attempted breeding: a few pairs unsuccessfully attempted breeding (nests apparently destroyed by bad weather).
FRANCE Influx: total of 92 in May 1997.
ICELAND Third record: 10th July 1995 (*Bliki* 18: 38).
NETHERLANDS Largest-ever influx: mainly in northeast, on 13th-16th May 1997, with peak numbers of more than 300 on 15th May, including flock of 200 at Lauwersmeer, Groningen.
POLAND Massive influx: several thousands in May 1997.

Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*
BULGARIA Second record: one with flock of Smews *Mergellus albellus* on River Danube near Tutrakan on 5th January 1997 (*Za Ptitzite* 1: 13).

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
ANDORRA First record: Grau Roig (2,120 m) on 25th March 1997.
GIBRALTAR First breeding records: single pairs in Botanic Gardens and in The Mount gardens in 1997, after suspected breeding in 1996 (first three records were in April 1990, April 1991 and October 1991; irregular until April 1995, then regular and present throughout garden habitats in 1997).

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*
HUNGARY Correction: first record was 18th December 1985 (not 18th November 1985 as given in *Brit. Birds* 90: 244; *Túzok* 1: 24, 25).

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*
SPAIN First record (vagrant/escape): Laxe, La Coruna, on 28th May 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 133).

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*
ICELAND First record: female at Heimaey, Vestm., on 19th October 1995 (*Bliki* 17: 27-28; 18: 39).

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*
BELGIUM Fifth record: 21st March 1993 (*Aves* 33: 181).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrant: 22nd October 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 488).

Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*
NETHERLANDS First well-documented breeding: pair successfully reared four young at Maastricht, Limburg, during March-July 1997.
SWEDEN Population increase: augmented by the release of 2,759 captive-bred young, breeding population has increased from its lowest point in about 1985 to about 400 territories in 1996 (*Ornis Svecica* 7: 49-60).

Hawk Owl *Surnia ulula*
NETHERLANDS Second record: 2nd April 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 12-14, 106).

Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum*
HUNGARY Fourth and fifth records: 19th January 1994 and 7th-8th December 1996 (*Túzok* 1: 24; 2: 63-65; *Aquila* 102: 206, 221-224, 240-242).

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*
FRANCE Census: 97-134 breeding pairs in 1993, a good year, coinciding with plague of Common Voles *Microtus arvalis* (*Ornithos* 4: 35-40).

Tengmalm's Owl *Aegolius funereus*
HUNGARY First breeding record: two pairs successfully nested in Zemplén Hills in 1997*.

Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis*
FRANCE First record this century: found dead in Alpilles, Bouches-du-Rhône, in June 1997*.

Common Swift *Apus apus*
MALTA Second breeding record: pair bred in house ventilator in 1997 (first was in cliff crevice in May 1909).

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*
SWITZERLAND First Swiss record north of Alps: found dead at Weggis on 2nd June 1995 (*Nos Oiseaux* 44: 39).

White-rumped Swift *Apus caffer*
PORTUGAL First breeding record: up to six individuals during 13th-16th July 1995; two remained on 29th-30th July, with young at one nest on 30th (*Pardela* 1(5): 12; 2(2): 20-21; 3(5): 12).

Little Swift *Apus affinis*
CYPRUS Vagrant: 6th May 1996 (not 25th May 1996, *Brit. Birds* 90: 244; five previous records; *Cyprus Orn. Soc. (1957) Ann. Rep.* 43: 42).
PORTUGAL First record: Ericeira, Lisboa, on 26th May 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 12-13).
SPAIN Vagrant: Matalascañas, Huelva, on 13th May 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 133).

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus*
CYPRUS Vagrants: 2nd May 1996 and 10th May 1996 (*Cyprus Orn. Soc. (1957) Ann. Rep.* 43: 42).
FINLAND Second record: Kalajoki on 26th-27th May 1996.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*
BELGIUM First breeding in Flanders: two pairs nested in Adinkerke in 1996, one pair rearing two young and the other one (*Mergus* 10: 199-202).
GREAT BRITAIN Unprecedented influx: about 65 in May 1997, including flock of 18 in Oxfordshire, one of largest-ever flocks recorded in Britain.
ITALY Increase: range expansion accelerated from early 1980s, with 4,000-6,000 pairs estimated in 1990s, of which 3,000-5,000 pairs in Sardinia (*Riv. Ital. Orn.* 66: 155-169).

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
DENMARK Highest-ever number: 41 in 1995, including one breeding pair (first since 1977, the 1993 report, *Brit. Birds* 89: 259, being rejected) with four juveniles (*DOFT* 91: 35).

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*
NETHERLANDS First breeding since 1962: more than ten territories in Limburg, including at least three nests with fledglings, two at Ambt Montfort and one at Margraten, in 1997. First record for Noord-Holland: Vogelenzang on 3rd-19th May 1997.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*
SLOVENIA Range extension: breeding confirmed in Gorjanci Mountains in 1995 and

1996 (previously known only from Kočevski Rog, where first breeding record was in 1989, *Acrocephalus* 12: 14-18; 17: 153-155).
SWITZERLAND First record: male at Schanfigg, Graubünden, on 15th-26th April 1996 (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 185-190, 199).

Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*
CANARY ISLANDS First and second records: Lanzarote in January 1988* and Fuerteventura in February 1997*.

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*
GREAT BRITAIN Fifth record: 17th-18th April 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 490).

Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*
FINLAND Second and third records: Äänekoski, Central Finland, on 26th-27th May 1996 and Pello, Lapland, from 31st May to 3rd June 1996.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
GREAT BRITAIN Highest-ever numbers: 38 in 1994 and 28 in 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 429).

Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*
CYPRUS First breeding record of race *cantarella*: pair feeding 8- to 10-day-old nestling on 31st May 1997.
GREAT BRITAIN Population decrease: over four million birds have been lost from the breeding population since 1976 (*BTO News* 210/211: 23).

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
GREAT BRITAIN Fourth record: 8th October 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 491).

Cliff Swallow *Hirundo pyrrhonota*
GREAT BRITAIN Fifth record: 1st October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 534).
IRELAND First record: Dunmore Head, Co. Kerry, on 16th November 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 439-440, 467).

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*
CYPRUS Vagrants: 20th April 1995, 8th April 1996 and 9th April 1996 (*Cyprus Orn. Soc. (1957) Ann. Rep.* 43: 46, 71).
GERMANY Vagrants: 30 records in 1995, one in May, the others in September-November (*Limicola* 11: 187-188).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: 154 in 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 470).
IRELAND Vagrants: 20th October 1990, 21st October 1995 and 3rd-10th December 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 467).
MOROCCO Winter record: first-winter at Massa on 31st December 1996* (28 previous records).
PORTUGAL Vagrants and overwintering: at Lagoa de Santo André, Setúbal, four from 14th January to 3rd April 1995, including one from 1994, two on 21st October and five on 5th November; Cabo Espichel, Setúbal, on 10th-30th October 1995.
SPAIN Autumn/winter influx: nine records involving 37 individuals in 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 134, 136).
SWITZERLAND Fifth record: Ins on 25th-27th April 1997.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*
FINLAND Vagrant: 28th September to 3rd October 1995 (nine previous records; *Alula* 3: 88).
GERMANY First record: first-year on Heligoland from 25th September to 2nd October 1996 (*Limicola* 11: 117-119).
GREAT BRITAIN Third and seventh records: 20th-22nd October 1993 and 14th-16th October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 492).

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
FINLAND Vagrants: 20th-21st October 1995 and 2nd-4th November 1995 (19 previous records; *Alula* 3: 88).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: 31st October 1993 and six in September-October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 492-493).
NORWAY Vagrants: 25th September 1993 (total of 22 records; *Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 287).
POLAND Vagrant: Zywiecki Reservoir on 1st December 1996 (tenth record, many earlier records rejected after revision, *Not. Orn.* 37: 315).

Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi*
ESTONIA First record: trapped at Lao, Pärnu district, on 10th August 1997*.
FINLAND Deletion: record on 19th May 1973 now rejected.
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: four in September-October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 493).

Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrant: 30th September to 28th October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 494).

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
CHANNEL ISLANDS Second record: juvenile at La Claire Mare, Guernsey, on 19th-20th August 1997 (first record was on 5th May 1995).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: eight in 1996 (88 previous records; *Brit. Birds* 90: 494-495).
ICELAND Fifth record: 8th October 1995 (*Bliki* 18: 40).
IRELAND Third record: Ballycotton, Co. Cork, on 21st September 1993 (fourth was in October 1993; *Irish Birds* 5: 469).
POLAND Breeding-range extension: pair bred successfully at Turawski Reservoir, Silesia,

in May-June 1997 (at least five other breeding localities in northeast Poland).
SPAIN Vagrant: 20th September 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 136).
SWITZERLAND Fifth record: female at Chevroux, Vaud/Gletterens, Fribourg, on 9th May 1997.

Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*
GREAT BRITAIN First record: 20th February to 18th March 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 495).

Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*
ISRAEL Second and fourth records: Eilat on 1st January 1989 and in March 1997 (record previously published as second, *Brit. Birds* 83: 227, requires correcting: it concerns male and female at Eilat from 21st November 1989 to 4th February 1990, *Birds of Israel*).

Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis*
FINLAND Third record: overwintered successfully at Pieksämäki, Central Finland, from 10th December 1996 to 6th April 1997 (first and second records were in October 1987 and October 1993, *Brit. Birds* 81: 336; 88: 275).

Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*
FINLAND First record: 27th May 1995 (*Alula* 3: 88).
GERMANY First record this century: Mecklenburg-Vorpommern on 6th October 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 190).

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
MALTA First breeding record: pair with fledged young on Gozo in 1997.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*
MOROCCO First record: Marrha plain, near Touroug, on 17th April 1997*.

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*
GERMANY First record: Heligoland on 5th-12th November 1995 (*Limicola* 9: 339; 10: 177-180; 11: 190).

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*
GERMANY Vagrants of race *maura*: three, on 15th April 1995, 23rd April 1995 and 2nd November 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 190).
NETHERLANDS Vagrants of race *maura*: 9th October 1995, 17th October 1995 and 18th-20th October 1995 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 108).
PORTUGAL Second record of race *maura/stejnegeri*: 5th November 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 14).

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrant: 29th October 1996 (nine previous records; *Brit. Birds* 90: 496).
NETHERLANDS First record: Maasvlakte, Zuid-Holland, from 21st October to 8th November 1996 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 182-185).

Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica*
IRELAND Fourth record: Great Saltee, Co. Wexford, on 22nd April 1997.
SPAIN First record of race *melanoleuca*: 6th May 1994 (*Ardeola* 44: 135-136).

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*
DENMARK Fourth record: first-winter male at Nordenhuse Strand, Funen, on 16th-29th March 1997*.
IRELAND Third record: Garryvoe, Co. Cork, on 26th-27th November 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 469).

Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*
IRELAND Second record: 14th-16th September 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 469).

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*
FINLAND First record: 2nd-3rd June 1995 (*Alula* 3: 88).

White's Thrush *Zoothera dauma*
GERMANY Vagrants: 26th April 1995 and 30th September to 1st October 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 191).

Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrant: 6th October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 497).
ICELAND Second record: 27th September to 5th October 1995 (*Bliki* 18: 42).

Veery *Catharus fuscescens*
GREAT BRITAIN Third record: 20th-22nd October 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 497).

Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*
FINLAND Third record: 4th-5th November 1995 (*Alula* 3: 88).
GERMANY Vagrant: 31st October 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 191).
PORTUGAL First record: first-winter shot at Porto de Mós, Leiria, on 28th October 1992 (*Pardela* 3(5): 14).

Dusky Thrush *Turdus naumanni*
FRANCE Vagrant of nominate race: Paris on 7th January 1996 (*Alauda* 15: 187-189).

Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis*
GERMANY Vagrant of black-throated race *atrogularis*: 31st March to 2nd April 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 191-192).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants of race *atrogularis*: 13th November 1995 and four in January-April 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 497).

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*
FAROE ISLANDS First breeding record: pair

with four young at Klaksvik on 3rd June 1997*.
UKRAINE Range expansion: colony of eight to ten pairs in July 1988 in Melitopol, far south of usual range (*Proc. Ukrainske Orn. Tovarystvo* 1: 216-217).

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
HUNGARY First record: Fenekpuszta Ringing Station, Kis-Balaton, Zala, on 25th October 1996 (earlier reports, in 1951, 1992, 1995 and 1996, also in Kis-Balaton area, not fully substantiated; *Tüzok* 2:.60-62).

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*
GERMANY First records since 1975: Baden-Württemberg on 26th-30th June 1995 and Hessen on 12th September 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 191).
SWITZERLAND Influx: three records involving four individuals, in July, August and October 1995, the first since 1990 (*Nos Oiseaux* 44: 40).

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: 13th September 1996 and 17th September 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 498).

Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*
BELGIUM First to fourth records: Essen on 10th-12th September 1988 and Zeebrugge on 5th October 1991, 14th October 1994 and 7th October 1996 (*Mergus* 10: 345-356).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: three in September 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 498).
NORWAY Fourth record: 3rd October 1994 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 288).

River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*
BELGIUM Second record: singing male on 30th-31st May 1993 (*Aves* 33: 183).
DENMARK Highest-ever numbers: 34 in 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 40).

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*
HUNGARY Population increasing: 600 singing males on the Hortobágy in 1997.
UKRAINE Breeding population discovered: estimate of 100 pairs in floodlands of River Supoi, a tributary of the River Dnipro, in July 1995 (*Proc. Ukrainske Orn. Tovarystvo* 1: 222-223).

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*
BELGIUM Vagrants: 27th September 1992, 29th August 1993, 20th September 1993 and 4th November 1993 (four previous records; *Aves* 33: 183-184).
FINLAND Vagrants: 31st May 1995, 3rd June 1995, 10th June 1995, 23rd June 1995 and 3rd September 1995 (25 previous records; *Alula* 3: 88).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: five in September-December 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 499).
PORTUGAL Second record: 28th August 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 13-14).
SPAIN First record: Flix, Tarragona, on 1st September 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 136-137).

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
SWITZERLAND First record: 10th June 1992 (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 201, 257-260).

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*
IRELAND First record: netted near Youghal, Co. Cork, on 5th August 1991 (*Irish Birds* 5: 442-444, 469).
SPAIN Second record: 30th April to 9th May 1993 (*Ardeola* 44: 127).

Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*
FINLAND Third record: individual of race *elaeica* at Lågskär bird-station on 1st-17th June 1996 (previous records were in 1957 and 1983).

Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*
FINLAND Vagrants: 29th May 1995, 30th May 1995, 31st May to 1st June 1995, 5th-8th June 1995 and 18th June 1995 (23 previous records; record numbers, equalling 1992; *Alula* 3: 88).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: six in August-October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 500).

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
NORWAY Second record: 7th June 1993 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 290).

Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda*
FRANCE Small influx in south: seven individuals in April 1997*.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*
NETHERLANDS Second record: 26th November to 3rd December 1995 (first was on 1st-3rd April 1959; *Dutch Birding* 19: 109).

Tristram's Warbler *Sylvia deserticola*
CANARY ISLANDS First record: Fuerteventura on 30th October 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 137).

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*
SWITZERLAND First breeding record: three young reared at Les Follatères/Fully, Valais, in 1996 (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 201-202).

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*
FINLAND Third record: male at Lågskär bird-station on 9th June 1996 (previous records were in May 1986 and May 1991).

Rüppell's Warbler *Sylvia rueppelli*
GREAT BRITAIN Fifth record: 21st June 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 501).

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*
DENMARK Further decline: only one breeding pair in 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 41).

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
AUSTRIA First record: male singing in Reichraminger Hintergebirge, Upper Austria, on 26th June 1997 and 4th July 1997.
FAROE ISLANDS First record of race *nitidus*: ringed on Nólsoy on 8th June 1997* (plate 3, on page 56).
GREAT BRITAIN Second record of race *plumbeitarsus*: 15th-16th October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 501).

Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*
GERMANY Vagrants: six records on Heligoland in October 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 193).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: 143 in 1994 (highest-ever total) and 57 in 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 434-435).
HUNGARY First record: 13th October 1996 (*Túzok* 1: 164-167).
IRELAND Vagrants: four in early November 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 470).
ITALY Second record: 14th April 1996 (*Riv. Ital. Orn.* 66: 173).
NETHERLANDS Vagrants: five in October-November 1995 (56 previous records; *Dutch Birding* 19: 109-110).
POLAND Vagrants: 19th October 1996 and 1st November 1996.
PORTUGAL First record: trapped at Loulé, Faro, on 27th December 1990 (*Pardela* 3(5): 13, 15).
SPAIN Second record (and first for Balearics): Mallorca on 12th-15th April 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 137).

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*
GERMANY Vagrants: ten records in September-October 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 193-194).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: 409 in 1994 and 203 in 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 435).
ICELAND Vagrants: three in 1995 (49 previous records; *Bliki* 18: 44).
IRELAND Vagrants: 15 in October-November 1995 (also one October 1991 and two October 1994, records reported late; *Irish Birds* 5: 471).
MALTA Vagrant: one ringed in April 1997 (23 previous records, last in 1992).
SPAIN Vagrants: 11th-13th October 1995 and 8th December 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 137).

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*
POLAND First and second records: singles trapped at Darlowo, Baltic coast, on 23rd October 1975 and 16th October 1996.

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: 4th November 1995 and seven in October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 502).
ITALY First and second records: Staranzano, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, on 10th October 1995 and north of Siracusa, Sicily, on 30th March 1996 (*Riv. Ital. Orn.* 66: 173).

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
ESTONIA Fourth record: trapped at Kabli, Pärnu district, on 1st November 1996* (third record was in October 1990, *Brit. Birds* 84: 234).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: eight in September-November 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 502-503).
IRELAND Fifth record: Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 19th-30th October 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 471).
NETHERLANDS Vagrant: 26th October 1995 (17 previous records; *Dutch Birding* 19: 111).
NORWAY Third and sixth records: 20th October 1984 and 31st October 1993 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 291).
PORTUGAL Third record: 23rd October 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 13-14, 16).

Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis*
GREAT BRITAIN First record: 20th-29th September 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 503).

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
SPAIN Vagrants of race *tristis*: 29th October 1988, 31st January 1993, 27th November 1994, 26th March 1995 and 6th November 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 137).

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus brehmii*
DENMARK First and second records: singing males at Fællesskoven, Zealand, from 31st May to 10th July 1997* and at Svanninge Bakker, Funen, from 23rd June to 16th July 1997*.
GERMANY Fourth record: 5th-26th June 1995 (treated as race of Common Chiffchaff *P. collybita*; *Limicola* 11: 194).

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*
ICELAND Influx: over 100 from October 1995 (cf. about 275 previously; *Bliki* 18: 45).

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*
AZORES First record: came aboard boat in Azorean waters on 7th November 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 14).

Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata*
MALTA Vagrants: two ringed in April 1997 (11 previous records).

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*
MOROCCO Fifth record: female at Tizi-n-Tichka on 1st May 1997*.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*
UKRAINE Colonisation: first seen in Sumy region in northeast in early 1980s, but widespread by mid 1990s (*Proc. Ukrainske Orn. Tovarystvo* 1: 85-88).

Azure Tit *Parus cyanus*
AUSTRIA Vagrant: near Amstetten, Lower Austria, on 16th-17th April 1997.
HUNGARY Deletion: record of 28th October 1989 reassessed as referring to hybrid Azure × Blue Tit *P. caeruleus*, so Azure Tit removed from Hungarian List (*Aquila* 102: 207).

Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegala*
SPAIN First European record: Tarifa, Cádiz, on 15th July 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 138).

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*
GERMANY Vagrant: 21st September 1995 (five previous records; *Limicola* 11: 196).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: three in October-November 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 504).
NORWAY Vagrant: 3rd-4th November 1993 (*Vår Fuglefauna* 18: 293).

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants of race *pallidirostris*: 26th-30th October 1994 and 18th-23rd November 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 504).

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*
NETHERLANDS First and second records of Balearic race *badius*: 5th June 1983 and 6th June 1993 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 65-67).

Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*
DENMARK Irruption: 1,493 in 1995 (highest number since 3,676 in 1985; *DOFT* 91: 45; cf. irruption into Finland, Latvia, Norway and Sweden in autumn 1995, *Brit. Birds* 89: 263).

Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*
SWITZERLAND First record of race *soemmerringii*: 1st December 1996 (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 202-203).

Daurian Jackdaw *Corvus daurucus*
GERMANY Presumed escape: Thüringen on 14th & 20th December 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 204).
NETHERLANDS Second record: Amsteldiepdijk, Wieringen and Anna Paulowna on 8th May 1997, at Donkere Duinen, Den Helder, on 9th-10th May 1997 and Egmond aan Zee, Noord-Holland, on 10th-11th May 1997.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*
GREAT BRITAIN Census total: BTO survey in 1996 estimated 1.27 million nests in the United Kingdom, up 39% on the estimate for 1975 (*BTO News* 209: 6).

White-shouldered Starling *Sturnus sinensis*
FINLAND Presumed escape: 6th June 1995 (two previous records; *Alula* 3: 89).

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
GREAT BRITAIN Population decrease: over one million birds have been lost from the breeding population since 1976 (*BTO News* 210/211: 23).

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*
FRANCE Vagrant: Vaudreuil, Tarn, north of the breeding range in Roussillon, on 5th June 1997*.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*
FINLAND First record: male at Hanko on 31st May 1996.
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrant: 13th July 1996 into 1997 (five previous records; *Brit. Birds* 90: 505).
NETHERLANDS First record: male on Texel, Noord-Holland, on 4th-15th May 1997.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
ICELAND Vagrant: 5th October 1995 (five previous records, but none for 19 years; *Bliki* 18: 45).

Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla*
CYPRUS Vagrant: 23rd April 1997 (six previous records).

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: three additional October 1995 records, increasing that year's total to 13, and six in September-November 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 505-506).
ICELAND Vagrants: five in October 1995 (five previous records; *Bliki* 18: 45-46).
IRELAND Vagrants: eight between 14th September and 30th October 1995 (19 previous records; *Irish Birds* 5: 472).
SPAIN First and second records: 19th October 1995 and 25th October 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 138).

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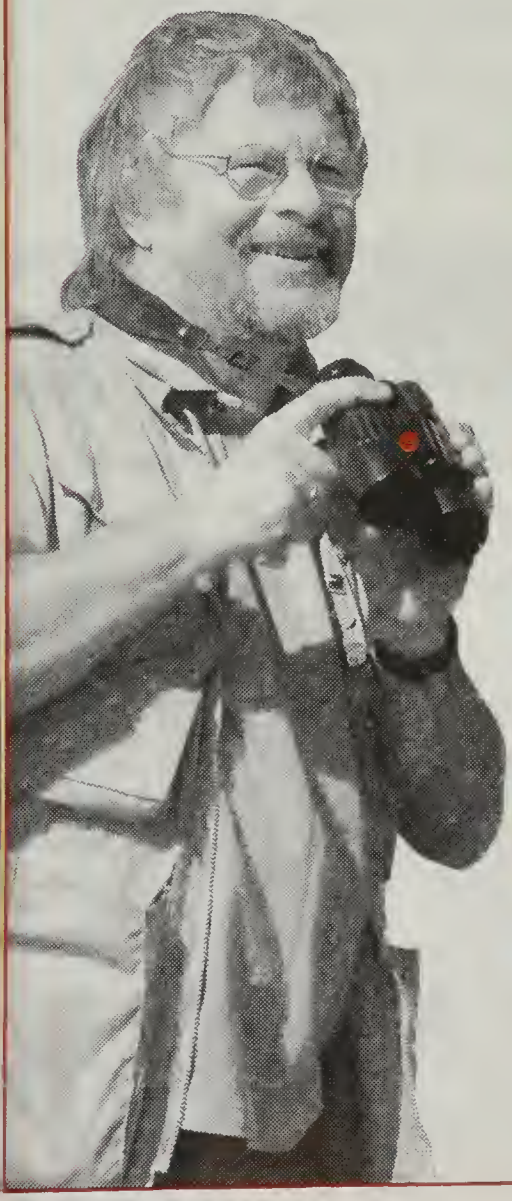

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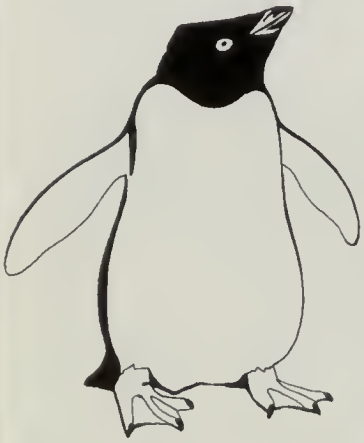

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Citril Finch *Serinus citrinella*
AUSTRIA Range extension: at least one breeding pair in 1997 at Dobratsch mountain near Villach, the first breeding record for Karnten.
FINLAND Presumed escape: 17th May to 2nd July 1995 (*Alula* 3: 89).

Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*
ESTONIA Deletion: record of race *rostrata* on 24th September 1994 (*Brit. Birds* 88: 279) not accepted.

Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*
GREAT BRITAIN Largest-ever invasion: 186 in 1995 and an additional 236 in 1996, mostly between mid November 1995 and April 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 506-509).

Two-barred Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera*
SWITZERLAND Deleted from Swiss List (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 206).

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*
CYPRUS Vagrant: adult male during 16th-21st April 1997 (seven previous records, but none since 1987, *Brit. Birds* 83: 229).

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*
FRANCE Decrease: possibly fewer than 20 singing males at Pas-de-Calais, Alsace, Doubs and Jura, in spring 1997*.
GREAT BRITAIN High numbers: 134 in 1994 and 174 in 1995, exceeded only by 233 in 1992 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 438).
PORTUGAL First record (but origin uncertain): juvenile trapped at Alvor, Faro, on 9th November 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 14-16).

Pallas's Rosefinch *Carpodacus roseus*
GERMANY Presumed escape: Heligoland on 17th March to 11th April 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 204).

Common Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*
ICELAND Influx: total of about 100 in autumn-winter 1994/95 (33 in 1994; only 37 prior to 1994; *Bliki* 18: 47-48; *Brit. Birds* 89: 266).

Yellow-billed Grosbeak *Eophona migratoria*
GERMANY Presumed escape: Niedersachsen on 17th March to 11th April 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 204).

Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: four in October-November 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 509).
ICELAND First and second records: 1st September 1970 and 19th-20th October 1991 (*Náttúrufræðingurinn* 66: 162-163).

Tennessee Warbler *Vermivora peregrina*
ICELAND First (and only) record: found dead on 14th October 1956 (*Náttúrufræðingurinn* 66: 163-164).

Northern Parula *Parula americana*
ICELAND First to seventh records: about 25th October 1913, 21st October 1948, 28th October 1952, 24th October 1957, 8th October 1962, 27th September 1989 and 29th September 1989 (*Náttúrufræðingurinn* 66: 164-165).

Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*
AZORES First record: Flores on 20th August 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 16).
IRELAND First and second records: Brownstown Head, Co. Waterford, on 11th-12th October 1995 and Kilbaha, Co. Clare, on 12th-31st October 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 473).
MADEIRA First record: two on Selvagens islands on 10th-12th September 1993 (*Pardela* 3(5): 16).

Cerulean Warbler *Dendroica cerulea*
ICELAND First record (and first for West Palearctic): immature in Eyrarbakki, Árn., on 1st-7th October 1997*.

Black-throated Green Warbler *Dendroica virens*
ICELAND Amendment: immature female found dead on 19th September 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 85: 461-462) has been placed in Category D, owing to finding circumstances.

Magnolia Warbler *Dendroica magnolia*
ICELAND First and second records: 29th September to 7th December 1995 and 21st-23rd October 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 89: 266; *Bliki* 18: 48; *Náttúrufræðingurinn* 66: 167-168).

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata*
ICELAND First to tenth records (11 individuals): 25th October 1964, 10th October 1976, 11th October 1976, 13th October 1976, two on 26th September 1980, 1st October 1989, 13th October 1991, 25th September 1993 (*Náttúrufræðingurinn* 66: 168-169), found dead on 16th October 1996*, and one on 19th October 1996*.
CANARY ISLANDS First record: Gran Canaria from 25th February to 2nd March 1984 (*Ardeola* 44: 139).

Palm Warbler *Dendroica palmarum*
ICELAND First record (and first for West Palearctic): immature in Stokkseyri, Árn., on 5th-10th October 1997* (plates 1 & 2).

▲ 1 & 2. Palm Warbler *Dendroica palmarum*, Iceland, October 1997* (*Ríkarður Ríkarðsson*). See page 55.

▲ 3. Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides nitidus*, Faroe Islands, June 1997* (*Jens-Kjeld Jensen*). See page 53.

▲ 4. Male Great White Egret *Egretta alba* and female Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* at nest with hybrid young, Latvia, summer 1997 (*Viesturs Klimpiņš*). See page 39.

Bay-breasted Warbler *Dendroica castanea*
GREAT BRITAIN First record: 1st October 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 444-449, 509).

Blackpoll Warbler *Dendroica striata*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrant: 26th-29th October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 509).
ICELAND First to seventh records: 28th September 1972, 18th October 1974, about 22nd-24th October 1974, 3rd November 1974, 30th-31st October 1975, 23rd October 1979 and 7th-8th October 1995 (*Bliki* 18: 48; *Náttúrufræðingurinn* 66: 169-170).

American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*
ICELAND First (and only) record: 10th-12th September 1975 (*Náttúrufræðingurinn* 66: 170-171).

Northern Waterthrush *Seiurus noveboracensis*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrant: 14th-17th October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 510).

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*
ICELAND First record: immature male at Garðskagi, Gull., on 26th-27th September 1997*.

Canada Warbler *Wilsonia canadensis*
ICELAND First (and only) record: male on 29th September 1973 (*Náttúrufræðingurinn* 66: 171).

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: 29th April 1996 and 5th May 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 510).

Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*
PORTUGAL Fifth record: about 14th or 15th January 1995 (*Pardela* 3(5): 16).

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*
GREAT BRITAIN First record: 8th March to 24th April 1994 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 510, 549-561).

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*
GERMANY Vagrants: two, on 11th November 1995 and 22nd November 1995 (*Limicola* 11: 198).
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: two in February-March 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 510).
IRELAND First record: first-winter male at North Slob, Co. Wexford, from 20th January to 19th February 1995 (*Irish Birds* 5: 473).

Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia*
NETHERLANDS Second record: 7th-11th May 1994 (first was on 11th October 1859; *Dutch Birding* 19: 8-11, 112).

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*
PORTUGAL Second record: Lagoa de Santo André, Setúbal, on 18th February 1996.

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*
PORTUGAL First record: juvenile or female at Cabo Espichel, Setúbal, on 14th September 1996.
SPAIN Second record (first for Balearics): Cabrera on 4th-11th October 1995 (*Ardeola* 44: 140).

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*
IRELAND Fifth and sixth records: adult males at Rockabill, Co. Dublin, on 4th July 1997 and on Tory Island, Co. Donegal, on 21st-27th July 1997.

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*
GREAT BRITAIN First record: first-winter male on 18th-26th October 1996 (previous records kept in Category D, status of this one still under review; *Brit. Birds* 90: 517).

Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrants: two in October 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 517).

Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula*
GREAT BRITAIN Vagrant: 30th September 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 517).

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MYSTERY PHOTOGRAPHS

▲ 5. Mystery photograph 210A.

▲ 6. Mystery photograph 210B.

210 Since about 1890, Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus* has greatly extended its range in Eastern Europe and now occurs as far west as Slovenia, Austria and the Czech Republic and as far north as Poland and Belarus. Much of its European range is also occupied by the considerably more widespread Great Spotted Woodpecker *D. major,* which it closely resembles. Mystery photograph A, taken by Peter Basterfield, shows a female Syrian Woodpecker in Tel Aviv, Israel, in December 1989, while mystery photograph B, taken by Robin Chittenden, shows a female Great Spotted Woodpecker in Norfolk in April 1994.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the two concerns a black line (the post-auricular stripe) which runs behind Great Spotted Woodpecker's ear-coverts from its black nape to its lower cheeks, where it meets the black moustachial stripe. An isolated white patch is thus created on the side of the neck behind the black line. Though Syrian Woodpecker's black moustachial stripe turns up a little onto the rear cheeks, the species lacks anything approaching a complete line of division. As a consequence, it has a less complicated, more open face-pattern with uninterrupted white or creamy-white from the lore to the side of the lower neck. Woodpeckers do not, however, always oblige by appearing at an angle which allows the side of the head to be studied. When such ideal views are denied, another obvious character can be used to distinguish the two species: the two longest outermost tail-feathers of Great Spotted Woodpecker are predominantly white, while those of Syrian Woodpecker are largely black.

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The commonest contact call of Great Spotted Woodpecker is a short, sharp 'tchik', while its normal drumming, which comprises some ten to 16 strikes, lasts about half a second. The corresponding call of Syrian Woodpecker is a noticeably softer and somewhat squeakier 'chook', and a typical burst of drumming, which contains 16-31 strikes, lasts about one second.

There are four or five white bars in view across the black flight-feathers of a resting Great Spotted Woodpecker, but, though individually broader, only three white bars are visible across the black flight-feathers of a resting Syrian Woodpecker. The tufts of bristles which cover the nostrils of Great Spotted Woodpecker are dark, and the dingiest parts of the pale area on its forehead are the sides. The nostril bristles of Syrian Woodpecker are mainly light-coloured, and its forehead is dullest immediately above the base of the upper mandible. Comparing the two species, the pale area on the forehead of Great Spotted Woodpecker extends rather less onto the forecrown, its dark cap is a little wider at the rear, and its central hindneck, mantle, back and inner scapulars are a slightly glossier black. Its lower belly, vent and undertail-coverts range from deep red to bright scarlet, while those of Syrian Woodpecker vary from a delicate pink to reddish pink. The dark undertail of Great Spotted Woodpecker is conspicuously barred with white; that of Syrian Woodpecker is either unmarked or only lightly barred with white. Furthermore, while the flanks and belly of Great Spotted Woodpecker are unmarked, the flanks, and sometimes the sides of the belly, of Syrian Woodpecker are variably, usually faintly, streaked with grey.

Juvenile Great Spotted Woodpecker can, however, provide a pitfall: not only are its lower underparts more pink-toned than those of an adult, but some individuals also show a few fine, dark streaks on the sides of the breast, and some lack a complete black line from the nape to the moustachial stripe. In such cases, it is only the lower part of the line that is present, hence the similarity to Syrian Woodpecker. Any doubt can be readily removed, however, by correct ageing: a red centre to the crown characterises juveniles of both species.

A red patch at the rear of the head separates the males of both species from the females. The red of male Great Spotted Woodpecker is more restricted than that of male Syrian Woodpecker, which extends slightly onto the rear crown.

Both adults and juveniles of the races of Great Spotted Woodpecker which inhabit Northwest Africa frequently display extensive red breast-markings. In addition, some juveniles of more northerly races of Great Spotted Woodpecker possess a few red feathers on the breast. In comparison, the pinkish-red on the breast of juvenile Syrian Woodpecker varies among individuals, from several central feathers to, occasionally, a complete, though faint, broad band.

I wish to thank Gerard Gorman for commenting on a draft of this text.

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NOTES

Little Egrets perching on horse

At about 11.00 hours on 18th September 1993, near the village of Lespignan, Hérault, southern France, I saw eight Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* quite close to the road. In a fenced area of rough, rather wet terrain by a stream, two horses were grazing, with a third standing quite still, as if asleep. Three of the egrets were perched motionless on the back of this third horse, and from the several 'splashes of whitewash' on the horse's back had been there for some time. The other five egrets were spread around on the ground, none actively feeding. After ten minutes or more, a very noisy lorry flushed all eight egrets, which flew out of sight, and the third horse started to graze.

BWP notes Little Egrets perching on buffaloes, but makes no mention of cattle or horses.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT A paper on feeding habits of this species in Camargue, southern France (Hafner *et al.*, 1982, *Ardea* 70: 45-54), does not refer to any similar behaviour, while Claire Voisin (1991, *The Herons of Europe*) stated that Little Egrets do not forage at the feet of or perch on the back of cattle or horses, although they often hunt in the vicinity of grazing herds. *The Herons Handbook* (Hancock & Kushlan 1984), however, recorded that Little Egrets will associate with cattle on dry land and also take ticks from them, perhaps implying an occasionally closer association. Nevertheless, it would certainly appear unusual for this species to perch on the back of large mammals, although the habit is, of course, perfectly normal for the Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*.

Variation and occurrence of *intermedius* Lesser Black-backed Gulls in southern England

Since the mid 1980s, increasing numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* in winter in Somerset have attracted close attention from gull-watchers. The majority of wintering individuals were clearly the same as the pale-backed race *graellsii*. Most were adults. Darker-backed Lesser Black-backed Gulls, presumed to be of the race *intermedius*, occurred regularly in small numbers both on passage and during the winter (see SOS 1988 for a useful summary). Individuals showing features attributed to the race *fuscus* were scarcer than presumed *intermedius*, with only two records (now considered unproven) compared with more than 100 *intermedius* bird-days per winter and increasing numbers on autumn passage. In Avon, *fuscus* is reported as regularly as is *intermedius*, but this discrepancy could not be examined as descriptions were not submitted routinely (Harvey Rose *in litt.*). Darker-backed forms become scarcer farther west in Devon (pers. obs.), where published records also include an unexpectedly high proportion of *fuscus* (9 *fuscus* : 27 *intermedius*, Rosier 1995). Notwithstanding problems of identification, *fuscus* was, at best,

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very scarce in southwest England and probably even rarer than was perceived, owing to incorrect identifications.

During winter 1989/90, I tried to clarify the identification of *intermedius* and *fuscus* at pre-roost gatherings around the West London reservoirs. Lesser Black-backed Gulls wintering in London were believed to include a high proportion of *intermedius* (Grant 1982, 1986).

Field identification of adults of the three European races has centred on comparison of the shade of upperpart grey, size, shape, head-streaking, wing-tip patterns and timing of moult (Barth 1975; Grant 1982, 1986; Post & Lewis 1995). All vary individually and overlap. Recognition of a subspecies is best achieved by comparing a series of individuals of different races and, where good numbers of two Lesser Black-backed Gull races are observed in the field, it is usually straightforward to assign individuals to groups. Deducing which races are involved is perhaps not so simple as published accounts, summarised below, have suggested.

The upperparts of winter adult *graellsii* are palest, with the greatest contrast between grey wings and black wing-tips; *intermedius* is only a little paler than Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus*; and *fuscus* is as dark or a little darker. Both dark races are small-bodied and slimmer than *graellsii*, with proportionately longer, thinner wings, *fuscus* being the more extreme. Both *graellsii* and *intermedius* have a streaked head in winter, while *fuscus* is believed to remain white-headed. Compared with the other two, *fuscus* has fewer, smaller white mirrors in the outer primaries and moults around two months later, so that wear and bleaching can help identification. Both *intermedius* and *graellsii* moult at the same time. Immatures can be identified with care by structure and the relative shade of grey feathers as they appear on the upperparts, noting that young birds tend to be paler than adults.

A total of 3,302 Lesser Black-backs was examined. The majority (97%) were adults, which could be divided into two groups: paler ones equalling Severn Estuary *graellsii* and darker ones considered to be *intermedius*, based on moult timing, heavy head-streaking and the shade of grey above. The position of the most recently dropped primary was used to quantify wing moult: samples proved that the two groups were moulting at the same time, completing their moult by late October or November. The numbers of both races are shown in fig. 1. None of the gulls could be assigned to *fuscus*.

No more than five individuals intermediate between *graellsii* and *intermedius* were noted. Even when size was similar, *intermedius* tended to be proportionately slimmer, longer-winged and slimmer-billed. A small proportion (about 3%) of adults had extremely dark upperparts, apparently not overlapping the range of typical *intermedius*; a quarter of these were darker than the darkest adult Great Black-backed Gulls. Two-thirds of the dark birds were particularly small and slim; the remainder, perhaps males, were larger, but with typical *intermedius* structure. All the small, dark ones had particularly heavy head-streaking and neck-streaking, bluish black-grey rather than the typical brown-grey; they moulted at the same time as the others and were presumably from a population of *intermedius*. Adult *intermedius* acquired fully white heads from 21st January onwards.

The failure to find a *fuscus* amongst so many *intermedius* confirmed that *fuscus* is considerably scarcer in southern England and casts doubt on the high

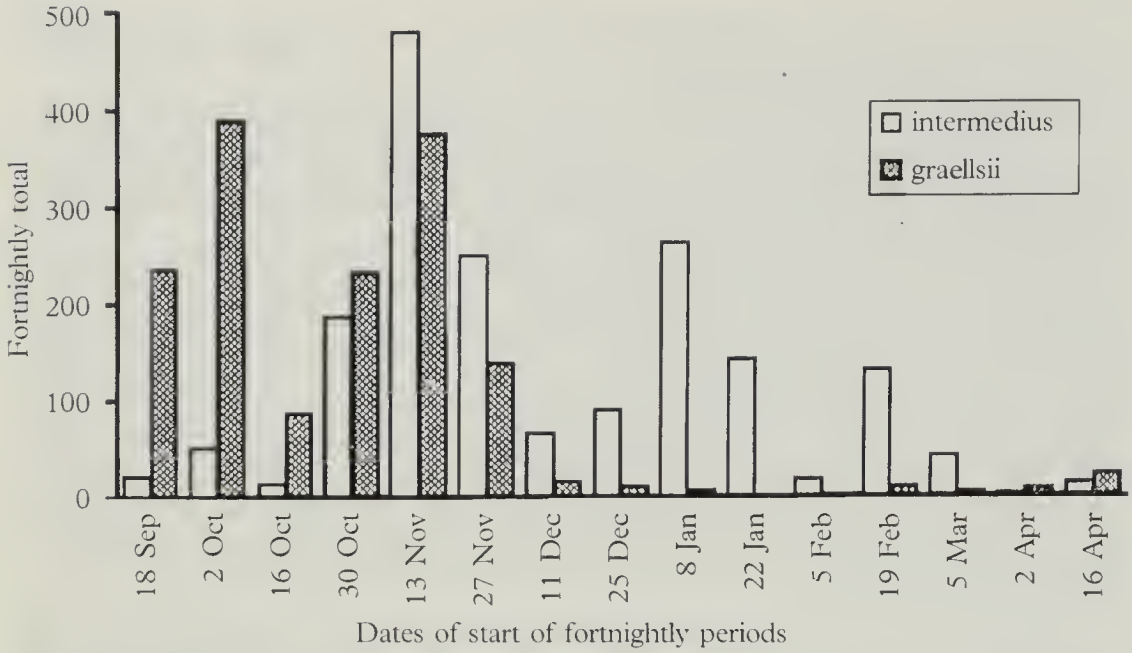

Fig. 1. Totals of Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* of the races *intermedius* and *graellsii* counted at pre-roost gatherings around West London reservoirs in winter 1989/90, within 15 two-week periods from 18th September 1989 to 29th April 1990.

proportion reported in southwest England. These observations also show that *fuscus* is less easy to identify than the literature implies, with upperparts colour evidently unreliable. Great Black-backed Gulls are useful comparisons, but subject to variation themselves, and *intermedius* can be at least as dark. The scarcer, smaller, darker forms of *intermedius* pose the greatest problem, especially after January when they have white heads; without the full range of variation present, a small, dark individual would look strikingly different, inviting confusion with *fuscus*. The timing of wing moult seems likely to be the best means of identifying such individuals, but further study of wing moult, feather wear and wing-tip patterns of *fuscus* is needed.

The population of *fuscus* in Scandinavia has declined sharply in recent years (Post & Lewis 1995), while ecological studies suggest that it is a distinct species (Strann & Vader 1992). Its status in Britain requires clarification, and full descriptions, including details of moult, wear and wing-tip pattern, should be sent to county recorders.

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Deception by Great Tit

In autumn 1992, at the Shell Carrington Reserve, Manchester, I observed an instance of deliberate deception by a Great Tit *Parus major*. The tit had been feeding alone at a birdtable when a large number of adult and juvenile Greenfinches *Carduelis chloris* of both sexes arrived and took over the birdtable, forcing the tit into adjacent bushes. After feeding for about two minutes, the finches took flight, allowing the Great Tit to return and resume feeding. These events were repeated, but on the third occasion the tit, instead of leaving the table, gave a hawk-alarm call and jerked its body into a frozen, crouched position as if in fear. The finches' response was immediate: all took flight into the nearby bushes. The tit then continued to feed until they returned, whereupon it gave a second alarm call, which caused the finches to flee farther into dense willow *Salix* scrub. On this second occasion, the Greenfinches did not return, and the Great Tit fed for approximately three minutes on the table and the hanging peanut bags before flying off.

As a primatologist, I am used to examples of deception by at least two of the great apes (Common Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes* and Bonobo *P. paniscus*), but I had not previously seen such behaviour from birds.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Dr K. E. L. Simmons commented 'I'm pretty sure that House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* do this at times when competing with large birds for mealworms', while Derek Goodwin added 'I strongly think that Blackbirds *Turdus merula* and House Sparrows do this sort of thing; possibly other species'. Dr Angela Turner, in her paper on Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* (*Brit. Birds* 84: 555-569), also referred (p. 565) to males giving predator-alarm calls in the absence of any such threat, as a means of preventing extra-pair copulations. We draw readers' attention to the possibility of such deceptions being practised by other species.

Magpie clinging to back of rutting Red Deer stag

On the Quantock Hills, Somerset, it is not unusual to see Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, Magpies *Pica pica* or Jackdaws *Corvus monedula* perched on the backs of wild Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*, presumably seeking invertebrate food. During 05.30-06.45 GMT on 24th October 1994, from cover at Rams Combe, near Crowcombe, I was listening to and, later, watching the rutting behaviour of a large, mature Red Deer stag which was attempting to control about 20 hinds. When daylight became sufficient, I saw that a Magpie was perched on the back of the stag, with another on the back of a large hind. The stag roared intermittently, ran to prevent hinds from straying and, once, opposed a small intruding stag, yet the Magpie remained at almost the same spot on his back. Perhaps most surprisingly, when the stag mounted a hind in coitus the Magpie continued to cling to his back, although it flew off soon after. In all, it was on the stag's back for 8-10 minutes; this would not have been unusual if the deer had been grazing or resting, but, during active rutting, the bird must have clung on with great determination.

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Crossways Cottage, West Bagborough, Taunton, Somerset TA4 3EG

Rooks feeding inside station

On 4th January 1994, at Carlisle station, Cumbria, I watched two Rooks *Corvus frugilegus* feeding on unidentified items on a railway line. The station is protected by a large arched glass roof, and the Rooks were at least 35-40 m inside this covered area. Derek Goodwin (1978, *Birds of Man's World*) stated that Rooks feed around railway stations, but do not usually come right into the station in the way that House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* and domesticated Rock Doves *Columba livia* do.

David M. Wilkinson
35 Meadow Lane, Worsley, Manchester M28 2PI

EDITORIAL COMMENT Derek Goodwin has commented: 'This is the first definite record (as distinct from hearsay of doubtful origin) of Rooks inside a building.'

Chaffinches feeding on Rowan seeds

In front of my house in Hilversum, Netherlands, there is a Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*. At about 14.00 hours on 22nd August 1993, a cold day (11-13°C) with several rain showers from morning to late afternoon, I saw through my window a male and a female Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* busily nibbling at the orange-red berries with which the Rowan was laden. From about 5 m, through 8×20 (and later 10×40) binoculars, I observed both finches, perched about 3 m up on a bunch of fruits or a branch, regularly picking a fruit, holding it at the centre, nibbling at it while extracting a seed and, sometimes with head-shaking, discarding the pulp, which fell to the ground; a couple of times, one made an aerial sally and succeeded in plucking a fruit. The berries were picked at a rate of three or four per minute, as if the finches were used to this mode of feeding. After about half an hour, they left, but at 16.00 hours the female was back feeding in the same way, although not so hurriedly. After a while I went outside, where I found the fruits, now seedless, under the tree.

From 27th August to 15th September, I observed one or two (once three) Chaffinches 17 times, mostly during 08.25-09.35 hours or about 18.00-19.15 hours. On one occasion, one fed continuously for 65 minutes, and once I saw a male on the ground picking up fruits and eating the seeds. I did not see the birds on the Rowan after 15th September, by when the quantity of fruits had diminished considerably. I presumed that the same two Chaffinches were involved, the male being recognisable by the large amount of white on one of his outer rectrices.

Snow & Snow (1988, *Birds and Berries*) did not mention the Chaffinch feeding on Rowan fruits, but did refer (p. 181) to records of seeds of *Sorbus* in the diet of Chaffinches and Bramblings *F. montifringilla* in northern Germany and records of both species taking some fleshy fruits in the former Czechoslovakia, though these did not give any details of how, or how regularly, they are taken.

H. Nuijen
van Hogendorplaan 10, 1215 EH Hilversum, The Netherlands

REVIEWS

Leicestershire Garden Birds.

By Steve Grover & Ken Goodrich.

The Leicestershire Garden Bird Survey, Birstall, 1997. 44 pages; 22 line-drawings. ISBN 0-9531584-0-3. Paperback £2.50 (plus 50p p&p).

They say that gardening is the new 'rock and roll' and there is no doubting the growth in popularity of that hobby—our gardens increasingly provide valuable habitat for many species. The BTO Garden Bird Feeding Survey, running for 27 years, has plugged many of the gaps in our knowledge of our garden birds.

In November 1995, the Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society, in an attempt to find out more about the 'common' birds of their area, launched their own Garden Bird Survey. The results of the first year's findings are published here in a pleasant little book. Contributions from 539 households have been analysed and cover the 20 'commonest' species, from Blackbird *Turdus merula* (first place) to Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* (twentieth place). Contents include methodology (deliberately simple), frequency (how often each species occurs) and abundance (by monitoring the maximum number of each species seen at any one time each week).

Many laypersons are turned to birdwatching by what they see outside their kitchen windows. This publication will answer many of their questions, will serve to ignite all those with a latent interest in our garden birds, and should encourage other counties to set up similar studies.

Barry Nightingale

Shrikes: a guide to the shrikes of the World.

By Norbert Lefranc & Tim Worfolk.

Pica Press, Mountfield, 1997. 192 pages; 16 colour plates; 20 line-drawings; 31 distribution maps. ISBN 1-874303-47-X. £25.00.

This book has the standard format of recent guides, following in the wake of *Swifts* (1995), *Skuas and Jaegers* (1997) and so on. Unlike most, which usually deal with 70-120 species, this slim volume covers only 31, making it an expensive book. The authors justify excluding helmet-shrikes (Vangini) and bush-shrikes (Malaconotini) on various grounds, but I feel that the additional 48 species would have made this a more complete and better-value book.

What is here is well put together, with excellent plates and text, but for the stated purpose as an identification guide there is perhaps too great an emphasis away from identification. For Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* there is less than a page on identification and descriptions, and only one page on geographic variation, whilst there are 1½ pages on movements and a page each on habits and food. Of 9½ columns on Brown Shrike *L. cristatus*, less than two are devoted to identification.

If you want a complete handbook to the world of the shrikes (Laniidae), this is an excellent, comprehensive and beautifully presented book. If you are looking for an identification guide, you may be disappointed.

Colin Bradshaw

REQUEST

Photographs needed, please

For forthcoming papers, we seek photographs (prints or original transparencies) of the following:

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* Flocks in Britain
Elegant Tern *Sterna elegans* Irish occurrence
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* Interesting behaviour
Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* All British occurrences
Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea* All British & Irish occurrences
Plus, as always, all 'BBRC rarities' (1997 and 1998)

Please send to Mrs Sheila Cobban, British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Front-cover designs for sale

The original unframed drawings of the pictures on the front cover of *BB* are for sale each month in a postal auction. The pictures are usually 1½ or two times the published size. These sales help not only the artists, but also *BB*, since the artists donate 20% to the journal. It is also a way for *BB* readers to acquire—for themselves or as a present for a friend—top-class art at very reasonable prices. During the past year, successful postal bids have ranged from £80 to £131, and the average has been £97. Why not send in your bid each month? If you are successful (if your bid is the highest, and it exceeds the artist's reserve price), you will be asked to pay the sum you bid, plus £1.50 for postage and packing. Send your name, address and telephone number and your bid (no money at this stage), to arrive before the last day of the month, to Cover Bid, British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

Bird Photograph of the Year

To recognise the best and most scientifically interesting bird photograph. Up to three colour transparencies, each taken during the previous year, may be submitted by each photographer. Preference is given to photographs taken in the Western Palearctic, but those of species on the West Palearctic List taken anywhere in the World are also eligible. The winner receives £100 and an inscribed salver, the two runners-up receive £40 and £25; all three winners receive books presented by *HarperCollins Publishers*. An additional award of £100 is presented by The Eric Hosking Trust for the highest-placed photograph submitted by an entrant aged 25 or under. Sponsor: none at present. Established in 1976. Closing date for entries: 31st January. For full details of the rules, write to Mrs Sheila Cobban, British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

Past winners: Michael C. Wilkes (1977), Peter Lowes (1978), Dr Edmund Fellowes (1979), Don Smith (1980), Richard T. Mills (1981), Dennis Coutts (1982), David M. Cottridge (1983), John Lawton Roberts (1984), C. R. Knights (1985), Alan Moffett (1986), Dr Kevin Carlson (1987), Bob Glover (1988 & 1992), Hanne Eriksen (1989 & 1990), Philip Perry (1991), Alan Williams (1993 & 1994), Mike Lane (1995), Roger Tidman (1996) and Jens Eriksen (1997).

Bird Photograph of the Year 1998

Despite approaching eight apparently highly appropriate sponsors, none has adopted this competition for 1998 following the ending in 1997 of the very successful three-year sponsorship by *Canon UK Ltd*, including prominent coverage in *Bird Watching* magazine and *The Times*.

Nevertheless, we have decided to run the competition in 1998, keeping it 'ticking over', rather than allowing it to disappear altogether after 21 years. The prizes will be *Pica Press* and *T. & A. D. Poyser* books of the winners' choice to the value of £100, £40 and £25 for the first, second and third, respectively; the winner will also receive the usual engraved salver.

Thanks to the Society of Wildlife Artists and the sponsors of 'Bird Illustrator of the Year'—*Pica Press* and *T. & A. D. Poyser*, who have also offered to provide the book prizes—a brief award presentation will take place at the Mall Galleries prior to that for BIY. We hope that a major sponsor will be forthcoming for 1999 onwards.

Bird Illustrator of the Year

To recognise an artist for the best set of bird illustrations. Amateur and professional artists are invited to submit four line-drawings (of specific dimensions) suitable for publication. The subjects should be birds recorded in the Western Palearctic (Europe, North Africa and the Middle East). The winner receives £100 and an inscribed salver, the two runners-up receive £40 and £25, and all three receive books from the sponsors, *Pica Press* and *T. & A. D. Poyser*, at a Press Reception at the Mall Galleries in London. Established in 1979. Two additional awards are presented: The Richard Richardson Award, for the best work submitted by an artist under 22 years of age, established in 1979 in honour of Richard Richardson, the East Anglian ornithologist and artist; and The PJC Award, for a single work of merit, established in 1987 by David Cook in memory of his wife, Pauline. All the winning

[*Brit. Birds* 91: 66-68, January/February 1998] © British Birds Ltd 1998

entries are displayed at the Society of Wildlife Artists annual exhibition and at the British Birdwatching Fair. Closing date for entries: 15th March. For full details of the rules, write to Mrs Sheila Cobban, British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

Past winners: *BIY* Crispin Fisher (1979), Norman Arlott (1980 & 1981), Alan Harris (1982), Martin Woodcock (1983), Bruce Pearson (1984), Ian Lewington (1985), Chris Rose (1986), David Quinn (1987), Martin Hallam (1988), John Cox (1989), Gordon Trunkfield (1990), John Davis (1991), John Gale (1992), Richard Allen (1993), Ren Hathway (1994), Andrew Stock (1995), Dan Powell (1996) and John M. Walters (1997); *RRA* Alan F. Johnston (1979), Andrew Stock (1980), Darren Rees (1981), Keith Colcombe (1982 & 1984), Gary Wright (1983), Ian Lewington (1985), Timothy Hinley (1986), Andrew Birch (1987 & 1991), John Cox (1988), Stephen Message (1989), Antony Disley (1990 & 1992), Peter Leonard (1991 & 1993), Max Andrews (1994 & 1995) and Simon Patient (1996 & 1997); *PJC Award* J. S. Lyes (1987), John Hollyer (1988), Darren Rees (1989), Andrew Stock (1990), Dafila Scott (1991), Richard Fowling (1992), John M. Walters (1993), James McCallum (1994), George Woodford (1995), Dan Cole (1996) and Paul Henery (1997).

Best Bird Book of the Year

To recognise the best recently published bird book. The winning book may, in one year, be an important, erudite, scientific treatise and, in another, a lighter, less-academic book, but will always be reliable, well-produced and thoroughly worthy of inclusion in any library. All books submitted for review to *British Birds* during the previous 12 months are eligible. Parchments are awarded to the publisher, the author(s) and artist(s). Established in 1980.

Past winners: Newton *Population Ecology of Raptors* (1980), Richards *The Birdwatcher's A to Z* (1981), Harrison *An Atlas of the Birds of the Western Palaearctic* (1982), Harrison *Seabirds: an identification guide* (1983), National Geographic *A Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (1984), Campbell & Lack *A Dictionary of Birds* (1985), Hayman, Marchant & Prater *Shorebirds: an identification guide to the waders of the World* (1986), Lack *The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1987), Madge & Burn *Wildfowl: an identification guide to the ducks, geese and swans of the World* (1988), Voous *Owls of the Northern Hemisphere* (1989), Turner & Rose *A Handbook of the Swallows and Martins of the World* (1990), Sibley & Monroe *Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World* (1991), Fry, Fry & Harris *Kingfishers, Bee-eaters and Rollers: a handbook* (1992), del Hoyo, Elliott & Sargatal *Handbook of the Birds of the World* vol. 1 (1993), Gibbons, Reid & Chapman *The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1994), Winkler, Christie & Nurney *Woodpeckers: a guide to the woodpeckers, piculets and wrynecks of the World* (1995), Shirihai *The Birds of Israel* (1996) and Holloway *The Historical Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland: 1875-1900* (1997).

Best Bird Books

Our postage-free mail-order book service to *BB* subscribers, British BirdShop, has always in the past included all those voted 'The Best Bird Book of the Year'.

Now, to give extra space for more books, all these highly recommended books will be listed individually only in the first issue of the year, but can still be ordered, *post free*, at any time, using the special write-in line in British BirdShop.

Have a look at pages ix & x in this issue.

Best Annual Bird Report

To provide public acknowledgment of the high quality of local, county and regional bird reports, and to encourage and promote high standards of content and production of annual publications in Britain and Ireland. Established in 1991. Entries should include one copy of the Report, details of number of members in club or society, name and address from whom copies may be purchased and price (with details of p&p cost). Closing date for entries: 15th December. For full details of the rules, write to Mrs Sheila Cobban, British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

Past winners: Suffolk (1990), Sheffield (1991), Essex (1992, 1993, 1994), Avon (1994), Norfolk (1994) and Essex (1995).

Young Ornithologists of the Year

To encourage and recognise the talent and achievements of young birdwatchers destined to become the leading ornithologists of the future. Prizes worth over £2,000 are presented by ten co-sponsors, to winners in three age classes (14 years and under; 15-17 years; 18-21 years). The judges assess entrants' field notebooks. Established by the RSPB in 1930s (run by *British Birds* since 1994). Closing date for entries: 1st September. For full details of the rules, write to Mrs Sheila Cobban, British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

Past winners: JUNIOR Jonathan Dean (1994 & 1995) and Matthew Slaymaker (1997); INTERMEDIATE Simon Patient (1994), Matthew Harding (1995 & 1996) and Jonathan Dean & Robert Martin (1997); SENIOR Stephen Votier (1994), Jane Reid (1995), Oscar Campbell (1996) and Matthew Harding (1997).

Donations to 'BB' and to the Richard Richardson Memorial Fund

British Birds relies on subscription income, advertisement income, sponsorship support and donations. Anyone wishing to help *BB* can make a donation (small or large!) either for a specific purpose in *BB*'s current expenditure or for our Investment Fund, the interest from which is used to maintain the highest possible level of *BB*'s service to ornithology, by subsidising features, photographs and additional pages in the journal (see *Brit. Birds* 87: 479).

The Richard Richardson Memorial Award Fund is a registered charity, the interest providing a book and small cash prize each year for the top-placed artist aged 21 or under entering the Bird Illustrator of the Year competition. donations to this Fund are also welcome.

Please make cheques payable to (1) British Birds Ltd, (2) British Birds Investment Fund, or (3) The Richard Richardson Memorial Award Fund. All should be sent to British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

May we also remind *BB* supporters that the Investment Fund is available for bequests, if any *BB* subscriber wishes to include mention of the journal in his or her will.

Thank you.

Free subscriptions for County/Regional Recorders

British Birds and *Carl Zeiss Ltd*, sponsors of the British Birds Rarities Committee, are jointly continuing to offer free annual subscriptions to *British Birds* to all the County/Regional Recorders, as our way of saying 'Thank you' to them for the hard work which they contribute to British ornithology in their 'free time'.

Photographs and drawings may be for sale

Many of the photographers and artists whose pictures appear in *British Birds* welcome the opportunity to sell their work. Anyone who wishes to obtain either photographic prints or original drawings is welcome to write (making an enquiry about availability, making an appropriate offer, or seeking the price) to the photographer or artist concerned, c/o Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ. We shall forward all such letters as a service to our readers and contributors.

Colour-marked birds: a reminder

Although colour-marking may be used in purely local studies (e.g. of behaviour), the majority of studies of marked populations depend upon co-operation from all observers who sight the marked individuals. Only in exceptional instances do we publish separate requests on this subject (there are far too many such studies to include them all). If you see a marked bird (other than with an ordinary BTO ring), please report it as follows:

CORMORANTS: Dr Robin Sellers, Rose Cottage, Ragnall Lane, Walkley Wood, Nailsworth, Gloucester GL6 0RU.

SWANS AND GEESE: Richard Hearn, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BT.

WADERS: c/o Stephen Browne, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU.

GULLS: Large gulls: Peter Rock, 59 Concorde Drive, Redlands, Bristol BS10 6PX; small gulls: Kjeld Pedersen, Daglykkevej 7, DK-2650 Hvidovre, Denmark.

ALL OTHER SPECIES: Jeremy Blackburn, BTO.

NEWS AND COMMENT

Compiled by Bob Scott and Wendy Dickson
Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'

Grants for conservation Good news? Not always

A Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £373,000 will be used by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust to restore habitat and improve public access at its 525-ha reserve at Hickling Broad and Marshes, stronghold of the Swallowtail butterfly *Papilio machaon* in the Norfolk Broads, where its caterpillars feed on the nationally scarce Milk-parsley *Peucedanum palustre*. The grant will be used partly to clear 16 ha of scrub birch *Betula* and willow *Salix* which have taken over part of the fen where the butterfly's food plant grows. Reeds will be cut in other areas of derelict fen, and dikes opened, partly to encourage Great Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris* to breed.

Good news? Yes, and we applaud the proposed actions as a major contribution to East Anglian wildlife. Unfortunately, the grant continues with money to enable the Trust to build hides, thatched with Norfolk reed, a visitor centre and a tree-tower, from which it is hoped that visitors will be able to see many of the neighbouring Broads. Why do we say unfortunately? Sadly, there are numerous examples of grants provided for capital building works that need maintenance in the subsequent years—maintenance for which funds were not provided. Two prime examples known to us are in Bulgaria and Thailand. What were once new and impressive structures—opened with a great fanfare—are now looking tired, unloved and unmaintained. It is not necessary to look so far afield. John Wyatt recently (*Bird Watching,* Nov. 1997) pointed out some contrasts between new facilities at Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust centres and maintenance needed on existing facilities. A similar problem faces other organisations, including the RSPB, with significant capital expenditure wrapped up in visitor facilities and buildings for which they must now additionally find many thousands of pounds each year for maintenance. Quite simply, it is relatively easy to find someone to fund or give you a tractor, but extremely difficult or impossible to find someone to fund the wages of a tractor-driver or the diesel fuel to put in the tank.

Conservation bodies would be lost and starved of resources if significant grant aid was not available from many sources. Grant-giving bodies or commercial companies providing donations are, however, often more interested in having an impressive place on which to attach their plaque than in seeing their money used efficiently to pay for mundane but essential day-to-day expenses. The impressive structure can be doubly damaging, first, by wasting funds, and, secondly, by needing maintenance for years after the funding stops. It is important that conservation bodies consider the implications before committing themselves to on-going expenditure that will be beyond their means. Let us use the money for wildlife before we use it for people.

'New' National Nature Reserve in Norfolk

Under such a heading, you would expect us to be applauding a further addition to the network of protected sites in East Anglia. Forgive us if we have become a little cynical.

The Mid-Yare Nature Reserve, managed and largely owned by the RSPB, has been highly successful. Specialities include England's only wintering flock of Bean Geese *Anser fabalis*, the Norfolk Hawker dragonfly *Aeshna isosceles* and some of the best remaining flower meadows in Norfolk. This is, of course, a major feather in the RSPB cap, and the designation as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) an accolade that confirms that it can hold and manage land of a standard that equates to a NNR. We rather suspect that this was known already.

So, what does it mean in reality? Will the Government agency (English Nature) now ensure that more funds and resources are made available to the Reserve? Will the site be better protected with its new label than it was with just RSPB ownership? Will English Nature now trumpet how many 'new' NNRs it has designated in its next annual report?

Wigeons get help

Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve was established in 1964 following concerns by wildfowlers and naturalists alike regarding a wildfowling 'cowboy' element. The same groups of people are now concerned about the declining population of wintering Eurasian Wigeons *Anas penelope*, which has decreased from a high of 40,000 in the early 1980s to about 10,000 now.

From 1st September 1997, a wildfowl refuge has been created at the south end of Fenham Flats for a three-year trial period. This joint project between the local wildfowlers—represented by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC), which provides a wildfowling warden at the Reserve—and English Nature, the site-managers, follows monitoring of the bird populations by Sunderland University and monitoring of wildfowling activity by local wildfowlers and the BASC.

While the cause of the wigeon decline is unclear, it is hoped that this experiment will help to show how the birds use the site, their interactions with wildfowlers and their use of the food reserves. The aim is to keep the sanctuary area as free of disturbance as possible, and visiting birdwatchers will be requested not to enter the refuge area.

More panic

Finding good birds—at least in the London area—seems to be a traumatic business.

Last October (*Brit. Birds* 90: 442), we reported on Dave Harris's 'panic-stricken state' when finding Surrey's first White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*, described in the *Surrey Bird Report*.

Now, we read Mark Hardwick, describing his discovery that a Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* reported at Hampstead Heath, Middlesex, on 19th June 1995 was actually a Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, and how it was only 'after about five minutes (it seemed longer) of complete and utter panic' that he calmed down sufficiently to note the bird's features.

In comparison, Andrew Moon seems to have been relatively calm when discovering an American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* and then, before that identification was clinched, a Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* at King George VI Reservoir, Middlesex, on 2nd September 1995, but even he 'frantically scanned' when he found himself in the 'ludicrous situation' of 'one, probably two American waders and no-one else in sight.'

The bumper, 196-page *London Bird Report for 1995*, edited by those two finders and containing full accounts of the two discoveries, may be obtained for £5.00 (+ 50p p&p) from H. M. V. Wilsdon, 79 Mill Rise, Westdene, Brighton, Sussex BN1 5GJ.

Fair Isle for free

Well, not for free, but with the help of a grant, if you are a talented young birder. Latest successful applicant to the John Harrison Memorial Fund is senior Young Ornithologist of the Year, Matthew Harding, who will be visiting Fair Isle Bird Observatory in summer 1998.

For details of the JHMF grants and how to apply, write to Dr Peter G. H. Evans, c/o Edward Grey Institute, Department of Zoology, 9 South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PS.

Desert Island Dozen and snalter-trapping

The Dorset Bird Club's poll to find the 12 species to share its members' 'fanciful, multi-habitat, far-away island' came up with a list of no fewer than 90 species nominated by at least one person. The top 11 were Avocet (nine votes), Red Kite and Firecrest (both eight), Pintail and Greenshank (both seven), European Nightjar (six) and Common Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail, Northern Wheatear, Blackbird and Bullfinch (all five); 11 species tied on four votes, so the twelfth species remains undecided.

The Club's *Newsletter*, edited by Mick Shepherd, is always packed with interest, from up-to-date news and travelogue articles to reminiscences of Dorset's past: 'The Portland expression of mild contempt, as applied to a small house, "only a twoholder" derives from' the 'snalter traps' (traps used to catch Northern Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe*) which were either 'two-holders', with two entrances, or 'four-holders'. The human population of Portland rose from 'about 1,600 in 1800 to around 17,000 in 1903' and the wheatear harvest apparently continued until the 1860s, with '300-400 caught in a day'; many fewer now occur, and, these days, 'a whole island count of over 300 in a day is very good indeed'.

For details of DBC membership, contact Eileen Bowman, 53 Lonnen Road, Colehill, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 7AT.

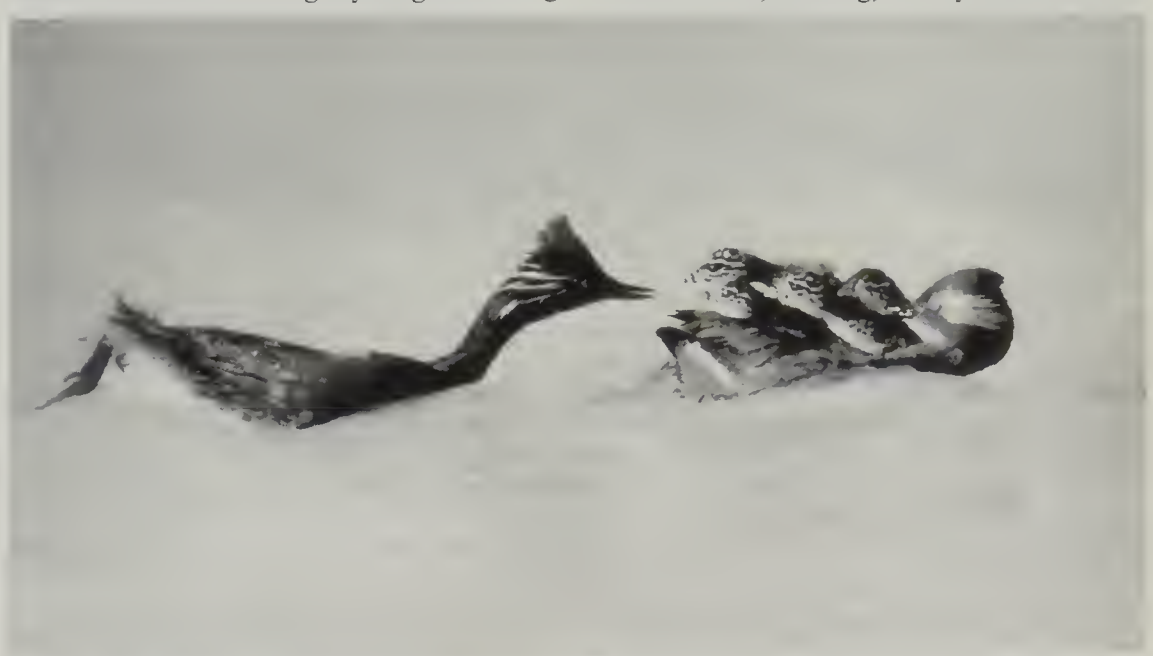
Jordanian records

Anyone with unpublished observations made in Jordan during 1995-97, or significant records from prior to this, is asked to send details as soon as possible, for inclusion in the 'Jordan Bird Report for 1995-97', which will be published in *Sandgrouse*, to Ian J. Andrews (JBR), 39 Clayknowes Drive, Musselburgh, Midlothian EH21 6UW; or e-mail i.andrews@bgs.ac.uk

'Wildlife': a winner

From all the images in the *BBC Wildlife* 'Wildlife Photographer of the Year' competition this year, once again sponsored by *British Gas plc*, one stood out for us: the winner in the 'Animal behaviour: birds' class. Torsten Brehm's Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis*, one adult bringing a morsel of food to the eager youngsters riding on the other's back, is reproduced in colour in *BBC Wildlife Magazine Portfolio* (a 48-page supplement to the November 1997 issue), but it is such a fascinating picture (plate 7) that we include it here for the benefit of those who missed it earlier.

BBC Wildlife subscriptions/back issues: PO Box 425, Woking, Surrey GU21 1GP.



▲ 7. **Black-necked Grebes** *Podiceps nigricollis*, **Namibia** (*Torsten Brehm*). Winner of 'Animal behaviour: birds' class in *BG plc* Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition, organised by *BBC Wildlife Magazine* and The Natural History Museum, London.

AERC decisions and recommendations

The fourth meeting of the Association of European Rarities Committees, in Slovakia in July 1997, took a number of significant decisions.

A taxonomic subcommittee was formed, to recommend the taxa for inclusion in the European List, which AERC hopes to publish this year or early in 1999. The List will include the Categories A-E as defined by Holmes *et al.* (*Brit. Birds* 91: 2-11). The first European Bird Report (covering 1993) is still in preparation.

The AERC recommends that a species new to any national list should be put into Category D unless it is almost certainly a genuine vagrant (in which case it enters Category A); if it is certainly an escape, it should be put directly into Category E. Since Category D is 'becoming more and more important', the AERC suggests that species on it should be 'tickable'. Effected here, this would add 16 species to the British & Irish List: White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*, Falcated Duck *Anas falcata*, Baikal Teal *A. formosa*, Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, Monk Vulture *Aegypius monachus*, Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*, Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*, Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*, Mugimaki Flycatcher *Ficedula mugimaki*, Daurian Starling *Sturnus sturninus*, Snow-finch *Montifringilla nivalis*, Palm Warbler *Dendroica palmarum*, Chestnut Bunting *Emberiza rutila*, Red-headed Bunting *E. bruniceps* and Blue Grosbeak *Guiraca caerulea*.

As with those on Heligoland in 1993 and in Hungary in 1995, the Slovakian meeting was sponsored by *Carl Zeiss*.

▲ 8. **Participants in meeting of the Association of European Rarities Committees, Blaková, Slovakia, 18th-22nd July 1997** (*J. Lontkowski*). Upper two rows, left to right: Ilona Schmidt (hidden), András Schmidt, David Parkin, Geert Spanoghe, Peter Barthel, Paul Mosimann, Christine Barthel, Angela Clement (hidden), Peter Clement, Walter Mergen, Igor Gorbań, Martin Riesing, Igor Shydlovsky, Michal Skakuj, Vasyl Demchyshyn, Tadeusz Stawarczyk, Alan Knox; lower two rows, left to right: Gunter de Smet, Tom Conzemius, Tibor Hadarics, Gábor Magyar, Klaus Malling Olsen, Bohumil Murin, Jan Lontkowski, Vilju Lilleleht, Helder Costa, Alfred Trnka, Jānis Baumanis, Miroslav Capek, Josef Chytil, Andreas Helbig, Marc Duquet, George Sangster, Eduardo de Juana, Pavel Brandl, Cecilia Johansson, Christian Cederroth.

Rare breeding birds

Observers with any outstanding information on rare breeding birds in Britain in 1997 are requested to send full details now to the relevant county bird recorder (or to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel's Secretary, Dr Malcolm Ogilvie, Glencairn, Bruichladdich, Isle of Islay PA49 7UN).

'WildWings' trip for YOY winner

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Swarovski
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The senior winner of the title Young Ornithologist of the Year 1998 will win an eight-day *WildWings* trip to eastern Poland, staying within walking distance of the famous Białowieza Forest — Europe's only unspoilt natural deciduous forest, and home to seven species of woodpecker—and participating in a one-day trip to the Biebrza Marshes with its breeding Great Snipes *Gallinago media*, White-winged Black Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* and Aquatic Warblers *Acrocephalus paludicola*.

The Intermediate and Junior winners will each receive 8 × 30 SLC *Swarovski* binoculars, and all three winners will receive *Barbour* jackets and bird books from the competition's other co-sponsors.

For details and a copy of the rules, write to Mrs Sheila Cobban, British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

IoW: a report worth having

After ten confusing years, with two 'Isle of Wight Bird Reports'—neither complete, some records in one and not the other, and conflicting statements—the Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society and The Isle of Wight Ornithological Group have got together. *The Isle of Wight Bird Report 1996*, a joint publication of the two organisations, co-edited by J. M. Cheverton and M. S. D. Hunnybun, is the splendid result. The 108-page report costs £4.00. There is just one difference remaining to be resolved—there are still two County Bird Recorders (J. Stafford and D. B. Wooldridge)—but the two organisations have agreed to aim to get the next joint report, covering 1997, to the publishers by the end of July 1998.

Local birdwatchers now have a report worth reading, and those elsewhere have one worth consulting. The balance in the text is good, with, for instance, one line for Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* but 20 for Common Chiffchaff *P. collybita*. We noted with interest that, although its status is given as 'widespread fairly common breeding resident', Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* was 'not recorded as a confirmed breeding bird in 1996!'. It must also be fairly unusual, if not unique, for the second spring migrant in the year to be a Hobby *Falco subbuteo* (on 13th March, pipped by a 10th March Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*, but ahead of both Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* and Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*, on 15th and 16th March, respectively).

The Big County

The West Midland Bird Club area comprises not only the West Midlands, but also Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. It would be useful for outsiders, therefore, if its *Annual Report* included a map as well as a gazetteer (six pages in the latest issue, no. 62 covering 1995). This, however, is almost the only criticism of the content of this book-sized *Report* (it runs to 184 pages), except that it covers 1995 and we are now, as we write, almost in 1998. (This is, however, the second *WMBC Report* published during 1997, so the Club is 'catching up'.)

Write-ups of the year's rarities always make a good read: 'Great Snipe [*Gallinago media*]? No can't be. Was it even a snipe? The heat really had got to me.' It *was*, of course, and the first for over 30 years, found by Pete Hackett. A Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* was the first for over 80 years, though there have been other recent 'probables', and Steve Whitehouse predicts more with the southern English population at a high point. The Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* find described by John Martin was even rarer: the area's first ever. The bulk of the *Report* is, quite rightly, devoted to the important birds: a page each for Redwing *Turdus iliacus*, Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* and Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*, and nearly that for Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, for instance. Over 300 observers contributed, but there are relatively few observers' initials given in support of records, so the next generation of budding WEOs may be finding it difficult to make their mark (see Bill Oddie's *Gone Birding*, 1983).

The WMBC's Membership Secretary is J. O. Reeves, 9 Hintons Coppice, Knowle, Solihull B93 9RF.

Unique guide

Bids are invited by the Yemen Ornithological Society for a very special copy of the *Field Guide to the Birds of the Middle East*, published in 1997 by T. & A. D. Poyser. One copy has been signed on the title page by each of the three authors—Richard Porter, Steen Christensen and Per Schiermaeker-Hansen—and the four artists—Andy Birch, John Gale, Mike Langman and Brian Small—have each painted an original bird portrait on the facing page, making a superb and truly unique edition.

Bids *open* at US$500 and may be submitted by fax (967-1-234 438), phone (967-1-248 309), post (PO Box 2002, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen) or e-mail (david.s@netqsi.com). Bidders will be informed of their status in the auction on the 1st of each month and the auction will close on 31st May 1998. Proceeds will be used by the YOS. An excellent idea, and we hope that an appropriately huge sum is raised for ornithological and conservation work in the Yemen.

Phantom Bird Club?

We read in the newsletter of the Yemen Ornithological Society that 'Many of our dearly departed maintain their YOS memberships in spite of the fact that they are unable to attend our meetings and group watches' (*The Lammergeier* 15: 4).

You can contact the YOS (annual membership YR500 or US$20) at PO Box 2002, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen; tel. + 248 309; fax + 234 438; e-mail david.s@netqsi.com; or perhaps by ouija board.

1997 records

If you have not already done so, now is the time to submit all your relevant 1997 records. The names and addresses of the County/Regional Recorders were listed in 1997 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 67-69) and updating amendments are given periodically in 'News and comment'.

Mike Langman on view

If you are in Devon and down Torbay way, visit The Coast & Marine Centre in Goodrington during 31st January to 14th February, where there will be an exhibition of paintings by Mike Langman on view from noon to 4 p.m. daily. For details, phone 01803 528008.

*Hippo*s or *Acro*s?

As mtDNA-sequencing studies proliferate, taxonomic views become more sophisticated, with field observers either nodding in agreement or looking bemused. The latest group to receive attention is the *Acrocephalus* warblers and some of their close allies (by Bernd Leisler, Petra Heidrich, Karl Schulze-Hagen and Michael Wink, *J. Orn.* 138: 469-496). Moustached Warbler *A. melanopogon* is confirmed as within the 'striped *Acrocephalus* group' along with Sedge Warbler *A. schoenobaenus*, Aquatic Warbler *A. paludicola* and Black-browed Reed Warbler *A. bistrigiceps* (perhaps worthy of separate genetic status, as *Calamodus*, with the small plain species in *Notiocichla*, leaving the large plain species in *Acrocephalus*). Two species—Booted Warbler *H. caligata* and Olivaceous Warbler *H. pallida*—currently included in *Hippolais* appear, however, to be closer to *Acrocephalus*, and better included in that genus (or separately as *Iduna*). For the time being, *BB* is maintaining the status quo.

New editor for 'Birding'

The American Birding Association has announced the appointment of Paul J. Baicich as Editor of its bimonthly magazine *Birding*.

A message from Erika

Your *BB* reference number is not cast in stone, to stay with you in perpetuity. It includes coded information on where you live (the three letters after BBS), the start-date of your subscription period, and how much you pay. If you move from one county/country to another, it will, inevitably, change. So, please keep a record of it, but check at the top right of your address label occasionally to see if the number has changed.

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Oran O'Sullivan—*Republic of Ireland*
Don Taylor—*Southeast*
Dr Stephanie Tyler—*Wales*
John Wilson—*Northwest*
Vacant—*Southwest*

MONTHLY MARATHON

That splash (*Brit. Birds* 90: plate 149) was caused by a Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, photographed by Pascal Bourguignon in France in July 1996. Less than half (48%) of entrants got it right, with other answers encompassing three other heron/egret species as well as Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*, Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*, Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo* and Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita*.

The black-and-white swimming bird (90: plate 194) created fewer problems, 62% identifying it as a Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri* and other answers being Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle* and Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*. It was the male which stayed at Vorran Island, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, for 12½ years, from May 1972 to August 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 66: 338; 78: 539), photographed in August 1980 by J. Miller.

The leading group (Stephen Foster, David McAdams and Richard Patient) got both right and, moving on to 15 correct answers, have broken away from the chasing pack of 677 competitors. Nobody has a total of 14, but three have reached 13 (Dave Hunter, Jørgen Munck Pedersen and G. Rotzoll), and three have achieved 12 (Carlos Gutiérrez Expósito, Jakob Sunesen and Peter Sunesen).

Maybe December's about-to-drink passerine (90: plate 208) or the rear-end view below (plate 9) will decide who will win the SUNBIRD holiday of their choice in Africa, America or Asia.

▲ 9. **'Monthly marathon'**. Photo no. 138. Eighteenth stage in ninth 'Marathon'. Identify the species. *Read the rules (Brit. Birds* 90: 66*)*, then send in your answer *on a postcard* to Monthly Marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ, to arrive by 15th March 1998.

RECENT BBRC DECISIONS

ZEISS

This monthly listing of the most-recent decisions by the British Birds Rarities Committee is not intended to be comprehensive or in any way to replace the annual 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain'. The records listed are mostly those of the rarest species, or those of special interest for other reasons. All records refer to 1997 unless stated otherwise.

ACCEPTED: **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* Portland Bill (Dorset), 13th March; Newhaven (East Sussex), 27th April. **Pied-billed Grebe** *Podilymbus podiceps* Dock Acres Gravel-pits (Lancashire), 24th May to 8th June; Skelton Lake (West Yorkshire), 14th June to 17th July; same, Mickletown Ings (West Yorkshire), 18th-19th July. **Madeira / Soft-plumaged / Cape Verde Petrel** *Pterodroma madeira / mollis / feae* Gwennap Head (Cornwall), 11th June 1996. **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis* Keyhaven Marsh (Hampshire), at least 17th February to 30th March. **Redhead** *Aythya americana* Rutland Water (Leicestershire), 4th-24th February. **Little Crake** *Porzana parva* Bough Beech Reservoir (Kent), 23rd-30th March. **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* Oldbury-on-Severn (Avon), 17th May 1994. **Little Swift** *Apus affinis* Hengistbury Head (Dorset), 5th June. **European Roller** *Coracias garrulus* Lochaber Loch (Dumfries & Galloway), 14th June. **Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* Hollesley (Suffolk), 26th May to 1st June. **Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* Abbotscliffe and Church Hougham (Kent), 6th October 1996. **River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis* Song only, Big Waters Nature Reserve (Northumberland), 2nd August 1996. **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* St Mary's (Scilly), 9th to at least 10th June. **Great Reed Warbler** *A. arundinaceus* Netherfield Gravel-pit (Nottinghamshire), 12th-29th June. **Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* Two, Singleton Lakes, Ashford (Kent), 14th November 1996; New Hythe (Kent), 14th-17th March.

M. J. Rogers, Secretary, BBRC, 2 Churchtown Cottages, Towednack, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3AZ

RECENT REPORTS

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan

This summary covers the period from 10th November 1997 to 4th January 1998. These are unchecked reports, not authenticated records.

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* Tooting Bec Common (Greater London), 5th December to 4th January; Rostellan (Co. Cork), throughout December to 4th January. **Canvasback** *Aythya valisineria* Abberton Reservoir (Essex), 23rd-30th November, then Welney (Norfolk), 3rd December to 4th January. **Brünnich's Guillemot** *Uria lomvia* Fetlar (Shetland), at least 29th to 30th December. **Audouin's Gull** *Larus audouinii* North Cliffs, near Portreath (Cornwall), 31st December. **Ivory Gull** *Pagophila eburnea* Gileston Beach (South Glamorgan), 2nd January. **Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti* Nine in Britain: Cornwall, Devon, Dyfed, Gloucestershire, Grampian, Lothian, Norfolk, Northumberland, and Somerset; one in Ireland: Rosslare (Co. Wexford), 2nd-15th December (third Irish record). **Hume's Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei* Alum Bay (Isle of Wight), 13th-17th November; Brighton (East Sussex), 16th-22nd November; Littlestone-on-Sea (Kent), 25th November. **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* Boyton Marsh, Woodbridge (Suffolk), 22nd-23rd November; North Ronaldsay (Orkney), 30th November. **Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis* Lower Earley (Berkshire), 14th, 19th and 22nd December.

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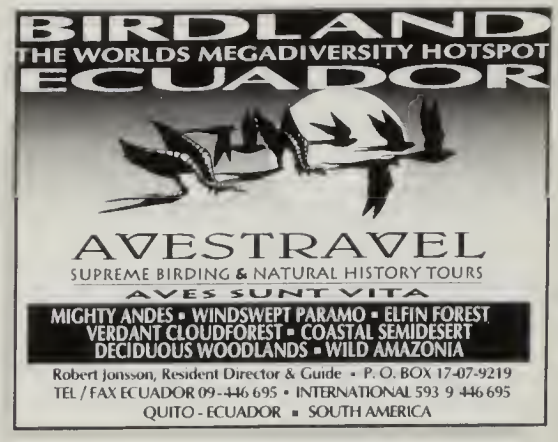

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Volume 91 Numbers 1-2 January-February 1998

1 **Editorial**

2 **The British List: new categories and their relevance to conservation** *John Holmes, John Marchant, Neil Bucknell, David Stroud and Prof. David T. Parkin*

11 **Looking back**

12 **Field identification of large falcons in the West Palearctic** *Hadoram Shirihai, Dick Forsman and David A. Christie*

36 **Conservation research news** *Dr Mark Avery*

38 **European news**

58 **Mystery photographs** 210 *Peter Lansdown*

Notes

60 Little Egrets perching on horse *G. E. Wooldridge*
60 Variation and occurrence of *intermedius* Lesser Black-backed Gulls in southern England *D. L. Buckingham*
63 Deception by Great Tit *Paul Brewster*
63 Magpie clinging to back of rutting Red Deer stag *Dr A. P. Radford*
64 Rooks feeding inside station *Dr David M. Wilkinson*
64 Chaffinches feeding on Rowan seeds *H. Nuijen*

Reviews

65 'Leicestershire Garden Birds' by Steve Grover & Ken Goodrich *Barry Nightingale*
65 'Shrikes: a guide to the shrikes of the World' by Norbert Lefranc & Tim Worfolk *Dr Colin Bradshaw*

Request

65 Photographs needed, please

Announcements

66 Front-cover designs for sale
66 Bird Photograph of the Year
66 Bird Photograph of the Year 1998
66 Bird Illustrator of the Year
67 Best Bird Book of the Year
67 Best Bird Books
67 Best Annual Bird Report
68 Young Ornithologists of the Year
68 Donations to 'BB' and to the Richard Richardson Memorial Fund
68 Free subscriptions for County/Regional Recorders
68 Photographs and drawings may be for sale
68 Colour-marked birds: a reminder

69 **News and comment** *Bob Scott and Wendy Dickson*

75 **Monthly marathon**

76 **Recent BBRC decisions** *M. J. Rogers*

76 **Recent reports** *Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan*

Line-drawings: 2 Greater Flamingos (*George Brown*); 12 Gyr Falcon (*John Gale*)

Front cover: Pied Wagtails *Motacilla alba yarrellii* in communal roost in trees in John Walker Square, Stockton-on-Tees, January 1997 (*G. M. Russell*): the original of this month's cover design, measuring 22.6 × 22.3 cm, is for sale in a postal auction (see page 66 for procedure).

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Volume 91 Number 3 March 1998

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Adaptor for TSN 1-4 EPS ..... .24
Skua case ..... .64
TSN-1 (45°) or -2 body ..... .289
TSN-3 (45°) or -4 body ..... .589
25x or 40x eyepiece ..... .89
20x (WA) eyepiece ..... .129
30x (WA) eyepiece ..... .159
60x eyepiece ..... .138
77x eyepiece ..... .125
20-60x zoom eyepiece ..... .185
Camera adaptor 800mm ..... .150
Skua case ..... .54
27x (WA) Screw-in-eyepiece ..... .74
TS-611 body (45°) ..... .229
TS-612 body ..... .209
TS-613 Fluorite body (45°) ..... .449
TS-614 Fluorite body ..... .429
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30x (WW) eyepiece ..... .159
20-box eyepiece ..... .189

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10 x 42 Imagic ..... .159
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8 x 42 Dioptron ..... .169
10 x 42 Dioptron ..... .179
10 x 50 Dioptron ..... .199
8 x 32 (HRII) ..... .197
8 x 42 (HRII) ..... .199
10 x 42 (HRII) ..... .209
10 x 50 (HRII) ..... .229
8½ x 50 (HRII) ..... .229
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10 x 42 BGA ..... .339
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HR 66 scope ..... .279
HR 66 (45°) ..... .319
15x, 20x, 25x or 40x HR eyepiece 44
20x WW HDF eyepiece ..... .96
28x WW HDF eyepiece ..... .119
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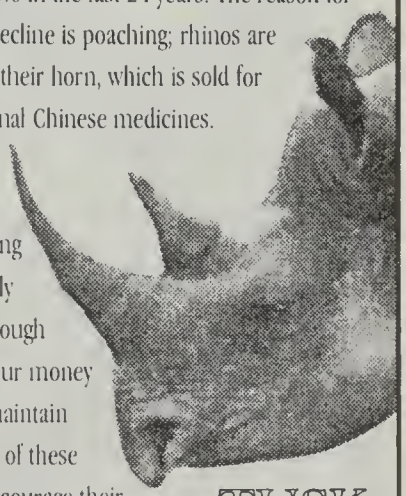

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Cetti's Warblers in the United Kingdom and the Channel Islands in 1996

Simon Wotton, David W. Gibbons, Michael Dilger and Philip V. Grice

ABSTRACT In 1996, the first systematic survey of Cetti's Warblers *Cettia cetti* in the United Kingdom and the Channel Islands located a total of 536-593 singing males at 168 sites in 26 counties across southern Britain and on Jersey. This was the largest number recorded since the species first colonised in the early 1970s. Two-thirds of the population was found in only four counties (Hampshire, Dorset, Devon and Somerset) and one-fifth at three individual sites. Cetti's Warblers showed a clear preference for areas of scattered scrub in reed-bed, reed-swamp and by open water. Territory density in these favoured habitats was 0.4-2.1 per ha.

The Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* is an unusual British breeding species. Typically, it can be found skulking in patches of dense scrub in damp areas and along river banks. Those present in the UK are of the nominate race,

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which generally stays in or near its breeding territories throughout the year (Cramp 1992), in contrast to the Middle Eastern race *orientalis* and the Eastern race *albiventris*, which exhibit migratory tendencies. Its most distinctive feature is its loud, explosive and far-reaching song, which allows it to be located readily in the field (Bibby 1982). The Cetti's Warbler is polygynous, with up to three females nesting within a single male's territory (Bibby 1982), and exhibits marked sexual size dimorphism, with males much larger than females (Bibby & Thomas 1984). Two other features make the Cetti's Warbler unique among British passerines: it has only ten tail feathers and it lays bright red eggs.

The Cetti's Warbler is a recent colonist of the UK and the Channel Islands. It was first recorded in March 1961, when one was heard, seen and later trapped at Titchfield Haven, Hampshire (Suffern & Ferguson-Lees 1964). The first record in the Channel Islands was of one at St Ouen's Pond, Jersey, in October 1960 (Long 1981). The colonisation of the UK by Cetti's Warblers followed a marked expansion of its range from the Mediterranean northwards into France from the 1920s onwards (Bonham & Robertson 1975). Prior to this, the species had essentially been a Mediterranean resident. Cetti's Warblers were recorded for the first time in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany during the 1960s. Further records in England occurred in 1967 and 1968, but it was not until 1971 that numbers began to build up, with three or four in Kent, one in Suffolk and one in Berkshire (Bonham & Robertson 1975). In 1972, more were located, particularly in Kent, and there was strong, though inconclusive, evidence that a pair bred in the county (Hollyer 1975). Breeding was confirmed in 1973 in the Stour Valley, Kent, and about 14 other singing males were present there at the same time (Bonham & Robertson 1975). The first proof of breeding in the Channel Islands came in 1973 at St Ouen's Pond, Jersey (Le Sueur 1980).

The population expanded rapidly throughout the 1970s, particularly in Kent (Harvey 1977), although significant populations also developed in Norfolk and Suffolk. By 1977, the Kent population had reached 93 singing males out of a total UK population of 153 (Batten *et al.* 1979). In the same year, singing males were also recorded in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Norfolk, Suffolk and Worcestershire, as well as on Jersey. By 1984, the UK population had risen to 316 singing males (Spencer *et al.* 1986), of which 114 were in Kent. The cold winters of 1984/85 and 1985/86 reversed the species' fortunes, particularly in Kent, and by 1986 the UK population had declined to 211 singing males. In that year, the Kent population declined to only 20 birds and, by 1988, none was recorded there at all.

By the mid 1980s, it was noticeable that the focus of the UK population had shifted from Kent towards the south and southwest of England. In 1985, for example, higher county totals were recorded in Devon, Dorset and Hampshire than in the former strongholds of Kent and, to a lesser extent, Norfolk. The concentration of the population in the South and Southwest has become ever more pronounced. It has resulted in an increased colonisation of sites in other counties in southern and western England, in particular Somerset, and in South Wales.

Cetti's Warblers tend to occur around wet, swampy areas near the water's edge where there is low and fragmented scrubby cover. From observations of the initial colonisation in Kent, Hollyer (1975) concluded that Cetti's Warblers required marshy ground with some open water, a mixture of young and mature marshy scrub, with willow *Salix*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and sometimes Alder *Alnus glutinosa,* and fairly extensive areas of bulrush *Typha* or Common Reed *Phragmites australis* amongst or surrounding the scrub. These observations were more or less confirmed by Harvey (1977) and a detailed study of the species' breeding biology and ecology by Bibby (1982).

Although they are usually sedentary, there may be some movement of Cetti's Warblers during the winter months when they tend to move away from dense scrubby areas into reed-beds and open marshland (Bibby & Thomas 1984; Lack 1986). Cetti's Warblers can be adversely affected by harsh winters, particularly when there are long periods of sub-zero temperatures and prolonged snow cover (Lack 1986). This is also true of the Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, the only other mainly sedentary British warbler (Tubbs 1967; Gibbons & Wotton 1996). Cold winters in 1978/79, 1981/82, 1984/85, 1985/86 and 1990/91 led to noticeable population declines in the following breeding seasons.

The Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) has reported on the British population of the Cetti's Warbler since the first confirmed breeding records in 1973, although its figures do not include records for the Channel Islands. The 1995 population of about 450 singing males was the highest recorded prior to the 1996 survey, indicating an upward trend in recent years. The highest recorded number on the Channel Islands was an estimate of at least 30 pairs in 1978 (Long 1981), although around 20 pairs are thought to have been present in recent years (*Jersey Bird Reports*).

In a European context, the population in the UK and the Channel Islands is insignificant compared with the numbers found in France and other countries of the Mediterranean region (Cramp 1992). The importance of the UK population lies, however, in the fact that colonisation has occurred only recently and at the northernmost limit of its range. The species may also provide an interesting case study of the effect of climate change on bird species' distributions.

In 1996, the first national survey of Cetti's Warblers was conducted by the RSPB and English Nature. This paper reports the results of that survey.

Methods

Sites

A comprehensive list of all known sites where breeding has been recorded was compiled from the records of the RBBP and county bird reports and by communication with county bird recorders. The information for each site included, where possible, the years in which Cetti's Warblers were recorded and its six-figure central grid reference, the latter to ensure that there would be no duplication of sites known by more than one name.

The 1996 survey was based on visits to these sites. All sites with breeding-season records at any time during the previous ten years (i.e. 1986-95) were

to be visited, even those with records in only a single year. Sites which had breeding-season records only prior to 1986 (historical sites) were to be surveyed only if there were records from more than one year; this was because during the 1970s, in particular, a large number of sites held birds in only a single year and these sites have long since been deserted. It was left to the discretion of the county organisers (see below) to decide whether or not single-record historical sites should be surveyed; in practice, a number were, either by volunteers or by RSPB field staff.

In most instances, boundaries of sites were clearly defined as many were nature reserves and/or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Site boundaries were more difficult to define in some river valleys. Because of this, the rivers Frome, Piddle and Stour in Dorset, and Avon, Itchen and Test in Hampshire were surveyed tetrad (2 km × 2 km square) by tetrad along that part of their length encompassing all known Cetti's Warbler records. Along these river systems, each tetrad was considered as a separate site. Individual sites were, however, surveyed in river valleys where there were records from only one or two sites (e.g. the River Tamar in Devon), or where records were bunched at well-defined sites (e.g. on the rivers Ant, Bure, Waveney and Yare in the Norfolk Broads).

Field methods

The aim of the survey was to record all male Cetti's Warbler territories on each site by recording singing males during three separate visits. Ideally, each visit would take place between dawn and 10.00 GMT and be made on dry, warm days with little wind. The dates within which each of the three visits was to be made were: 23rd March to 14th April, 15th April to 12th May and 13th May to 2nd June 1996. Special allowance was made for reserves where wardening staff were likely to visit parts of the reserve on most days; in these cases, observers recorded the approximate number of times the site was surveyed, if more than three visits were made.

Observers recorded the number of singing males on each visit and estimated the total number of territories on the site. Observers were given the option to record the number of territories as a range (minimum-maximum) owing to potential problems with differentiating between singing males in the field: Cetti's Warblers may establish linear territories up to 450 m long (Bibby 1982), with the male singing at various points along this length. It would, therefore, not always have been clear to surveyors whether or not singing males recorded at the two ends of a long linear territory were the same or different birds. In addition, lack of access to some sites may have led to uncertainty over the number of males present.

Observers recorded the location of singing males on a 1:25,000 map of the site. This helped observers to estimate the number of territories more readily and yielded a central grid reference for each singing male.

Habitat usage and preference

Observers noted in which of nine habitat categories each singing male was first recorded. These categories, which were modified from those of the 1979 reed-

bed survey (Bibby & Lunn 1982), were: reed-bed (*Phragmites* dominated); other reed-swamp (tall emergent vegetation, including *Typha* but with little *Phragmites australis,* >0.6m tall); fen/marsh (medium-height vegetation, including rush *Juncus* and sedge *Carex*, <0.6m tall); dense/continuous scrub; scattered scrub in reed-bed; scattered scrub in reed-swamp; scattered scrub in fen/marsh; scattered scrub by open water; and carr (wet woodland containing, e.g., Alder, willow).

Noting the habitats in which males were recorded allows the calculation of measures of habitat use, but not territory densities in each habitat type, nor habitat preferences. To calculate these, it is necessary to know the extent of each of these habitats available to Cetti's Warblers. To determine this, habitats were mapped on a sample of 100 sites during March-June 1996. These sites were selected at random from the post-1986 list of sites and the list of pre-1986 sites where there were records from more than one year. The sample was, however, stratified to ensure that 50 sites estimated to be >50 ha and 50 sites of <50 ha were included in the sample. This stratification was to ensure that the sample was not dominated by small sites which, it was felt, might be less suitable for Cetti's Warblers. For the purposes of the habitat survey, some of the categories were modified slightly, in order to facilitate the mapping of sites. Fen/marsh, dense/continuous scrub and scattered scrub were split into wet and dry categories. The habitat was considered to be wet if there was visible standing water. Scattered scrub was mapped as a separate category, but the extent of it within other habitats (reed-bed, reed-swamp, fen/marsh and by open water) was worked out retrospectively from the completed habitat maps. The following additional habitat types were also mapped: grassland; bare ground; open water; and dry woodland. The location and boundary of each habitat type was mapped in the field on 1:10,000 maps of each site. The extent of each habitat type on each site was estimated by digitising the field maps, and the total extent of each habitat type available to Cetti's Warblers calculated by extrapolation from the stratified sample, with confidence intervals estimated by bootstrapping (see e.g. Greenwood 1990). Territory densities and a preference index (following the methods of Manly *et al.* 1993) were calculated for each habitat type.

Organisation

Most of the ornithological fieldwork for the survey was undertaken by volunteer ornithologists or by RSPB, EN and other wardening staff, working through county co-ordinators to a national organiser (SW). The habitat surveys were undertaken by professional field staff (SW & MD).

Results

The population in 1996

A total of 421 sites was surveyed in 28 counties in England and Wales, as well as in the Channel Islands. Table 1 shows the number of singing male Cetti's Warblers recorded from each county, and the number of sites visited in each

Table 1. Number of singing male Cetti's Warblers *Cettia cetti* in the UK and the Channel Islands in 1996.

County	No. of sites visited	No. of sites containing territories	No. of singing males MIN.	MAX.	% UK and CI population
ENGLAND					
Avon	4	2	1	2	0.3
Berkshire	11	6	15	16	2.7
Cambridgeshire (including Huntingdonshire & Peterborough)	14	1	1	1	0.2
Cornwall	27	6	25	28	4.7
Devon	24	12	79	88	14.8
Dorset	60	29	89	97	16.4
Essex	8	1	1	2	0.3
Gloucestershire	3	2	4	4	0.7
Hampshire	67	33	129	143	24.1
Hertfordshire	10	0	0	0	0
Isle of Wight	10	1	1	1	0.2
Kent	27	4	6	8	1.3
Lancashire	2	0	0	0	0
Norfolk	36	15	41	48	8.1
Northamptonshire	4	2	2	2	0.3
Oxfordshire	5	2	3	3	0.5
Somerset	31	20	63	67	11.3
Suffolk	15	3	4	4	0.7
Surrey	6	1	1	1	0.2
Sussex (E & W)	8	4	7	9	1.5
Warwickshire	2	2	4	4	0.7
Wiltshire	9	2	2	2	0.3
Worcestershire	1	1	1	1	0.2
WALES					
Carmarthenshire	11	6	14	14	2.4
Ceredigion	3	1	4	5	0.8
Glamorgan	4	2	12	12	2.0
Gwent	7	6	7	8	1.3
Pembrokeshire	7	4	3	4	0.7
Total England & Wales			519	574	
Jersey	5	2	17	19	3.2
TOTAL	421	168	536	593	

(where river systems were surveyed by tetrads, each tetrad has been considered as a separate site). The survey located 519-574 singing male Cetti's Warblers in 26 counties in England and Wales with a further 17-19 singing males on Jersey. The majority of the population was located in only four counties: Hampshire (24%), Dorset (16%), Devon (15%) and Somerset (11%). Forty-four out of a total of 68 single-record historical sites (pre-1986) were surveyed. Of those surveyed, only eight singing males were located at four sites.

Table 2. Numbers of singing male Cetti's Warblers *Cettia cetti* **in selected years from 1973 to 1996.** Data are from county bird reports, the RBBP and this survey.

County	1973	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996
ENGLAND						
Avon						2
Berkshire			1	2	3	16
Cambridgeshire (including Huntingdonshire & Peterborough)			6			1
Cornwall		1	5	10	19	28
Devon		3	33	41	64	88
Dorset			26	37	35	97
Essex		2	3		6	2
Gloucestershire					2	4
Greater London			1			
Hampshire		1	15	35	43	143
Hertfordshire		1	3			
Isle of Wight			1			1
Kent	15	c53	80	20		8
Norfolk		17	31	44	23	48
Northamptonshire					2	2
Oxfordshire					2	3
Somerset			1	9	14	67
Suffolk		2	14	3	6	4
Surrey						1
Sussex (E & W)					6	9
Warwickshire						4
Wiltshire					4	2
Worcestershire						1
WALES						
Carmarthenshire				1	4	14
Ceredigion						5
W Glamorgan				9	4	12
Gwent						8
Pembrokeshire					4	4
TOTAL	15	80	220	211	241	574

Trends in population and distribution

Table 2 shows county totals for selected years from 1973. National totals from 1973 to 1996 are plotted in fig. 1 (data from the RBBP and county bird reports) and show the population trend of the species since the UK was first colonised. The population built up steadily to a high of 316 singing males in 1984, before successive harsh winters in 1984/85 and 1985/86 led to a noticeable decline. From a new low point in 1987, the population rose steadily, though with an apparent conspicuous increase in 1990. This was followed by a fall in 1991 as a result of poor weather during the preceding winter. The Jersey population in 1990 was estimated at around 20 pairs (*Jersey Bird Report*). The highest national estimate before the 1996 survey was that of 450 singing males in 1995. Also plotted in fig. 1 is the population trend in Kent. This shows that Kent held more than 50% of the national population from 1973 to 1979. There was then a steady decline until 1988, when no Cetti's

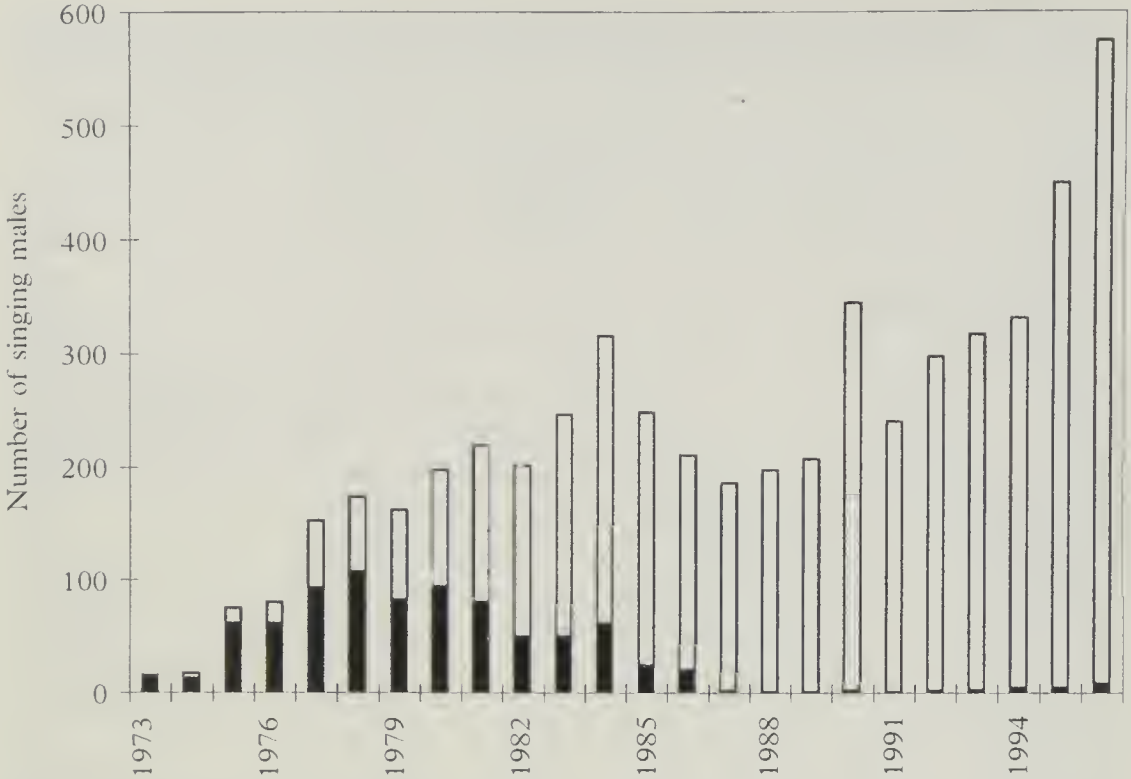


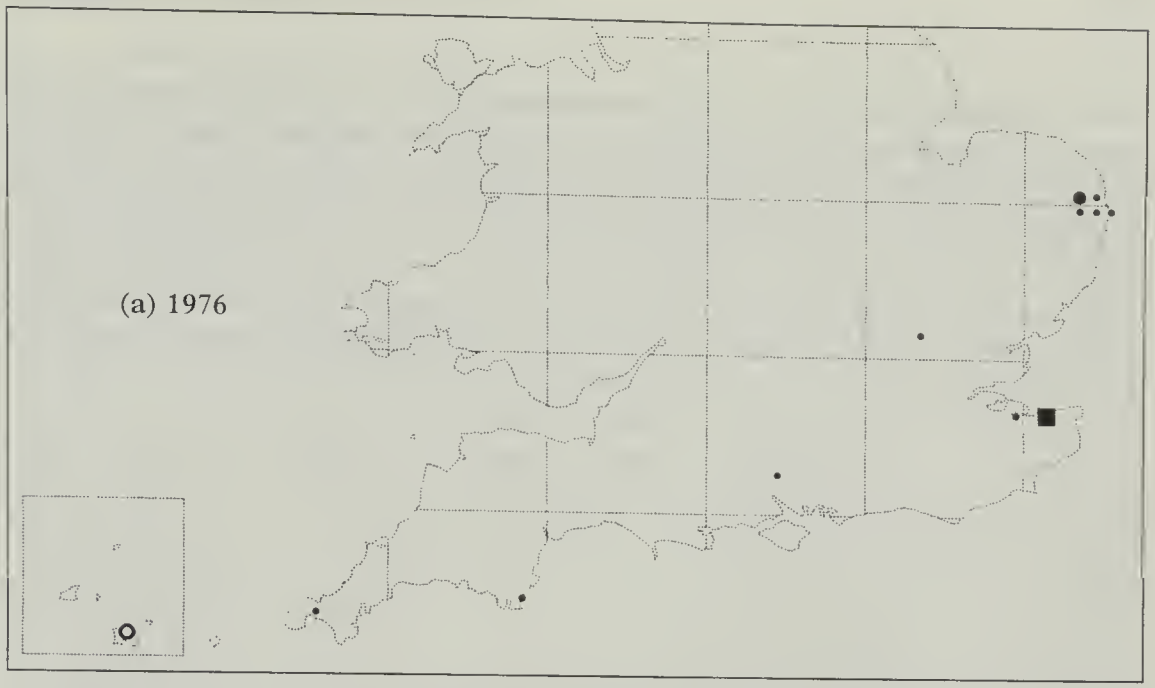
Fig. 1. Trend in UK population of Cetti's Warblers *Cettia cetti*, **from 1973 to 1996.** Black shading refers to the population in Kent and the white refers to the rest of the UK.

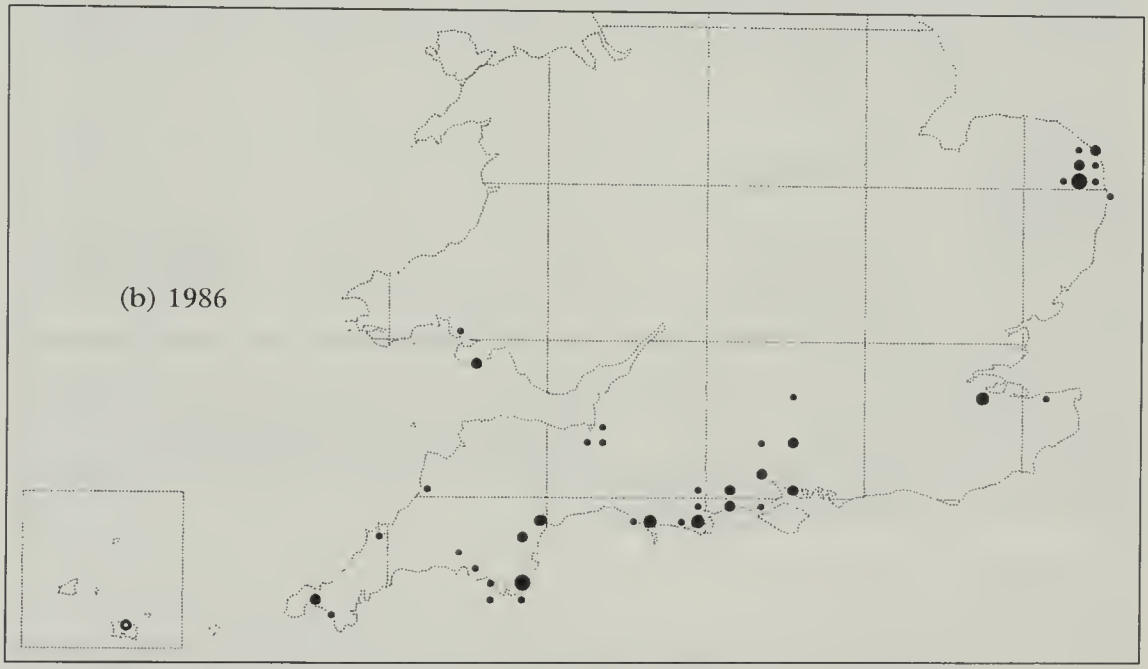
Warblers were recorded in Kent. The 1996 survey revealed evidence of a slight increase in numbers of Cetti's Warblers in Kent. The distribution and geographical pattern of abundance of Cetti's Warblers in the UK and the Channel Islands during 1976, 1986 and 1996 are shown in fig. 2.

Habitat usage and preference

The total extent of each habitat within the species' distribution (i.e. all sites with records from 1986 onwards) estimated from the habitat survey is shown in table 3. The number of males that were initially recorded singing in each particular habitat is also given, from which the usage made by Cetti's Warblers of each habitat has been calculated. Two-thirds of all records were from three habitats, all containing scattered scrub (in reed-bed, reed-swamp and by open water). Territory densities were highest in these three habitats, being on average over 2.1 territories per ha in areas of scattered scrub in reed-swamps. Cetti's Warblers preferred scattered scrub in reed-swamp, in reed-bed, by open water and in fen/marsh. They avoided fen/marsh, reed-bed and dense scrub, and used reed-swamp and carr in proportion to the availability of the habitat (i.e. were neutral to it). It is possible that the extent of the scattered-scrub habitats may be slight underestimates because of the way in which they

Fig. 2. Distribution of Cetti's Warblers *Cettia cetti* **in the UK and the Channel Islands in (a) 1976, (b) 1986 and (c) 1996.** The key for the symbol sizes (from the smallest to the largest) is as follows: 1-4, 5-9, 10-19, 20-29, 30-49 and 50+ territories. The figures for Jersey in 1976 and 1986 are estimated (Long 1981; Cramp 1992) and are shown as white rather than black circles.


(a) 1976


(b) 1986

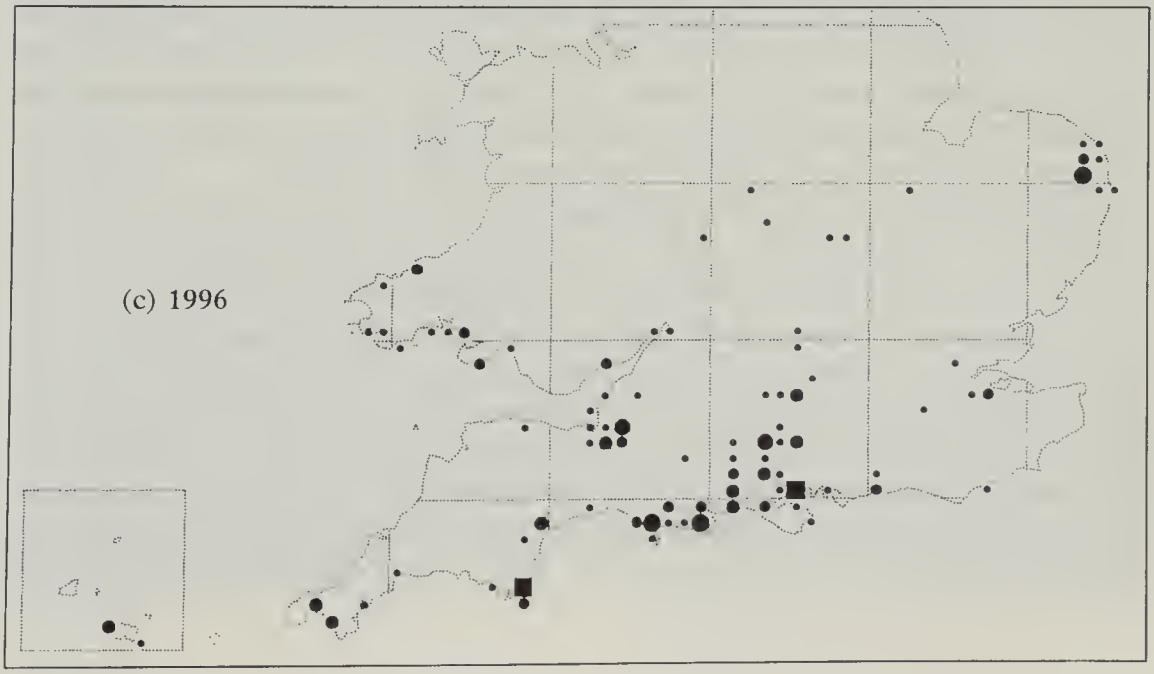

(c) 1996

Table 3. Habitat extent, and usage and preference by Cetti's Warblers *Cettia cetti*. The extent of each habitat (± 95% confidence intervals) is its total area within the species' distribution (all sites with 1986-96 Cetti's Warbler records or sites with records from more than one year pre 1986-96). All extents are rounded to the nearest 5 ha. The preference indices (with 95% confidence intervals) are calculated following the methods of Manly *et al.* (1993). Significance levels for preference indices are as follows: ** = $p<0.01$; NS = not significant. Those habitats where the upper confidence interval is <1 were significantly avoided and those where the lower confidence interval is >1 were significantly preferred. Where the confidence intervals encompass one, the habitat was neither avoided nor preferred.

Habitat	Total habitat extent (ha)	No. of singing males	% in each habitat	Territories per ha	Preference index
Reed-bed	3,130 (2,515-3,865)	41	7.1	0.01	0.20 (0.1-0.3) **
Reed-swamp	225 (150-305)	26	4.5	0.12	1.73 (0.59-2.87) NS
Fen/marsh	1,990 (1,650-2,345)	2	0.3	0.001	0.01 (0-0.042) **
Dense scrub	2,165 (1,905-2,475)	64	11.1	0.03	0.44 (0.28-0.6) **
Scattered scrub in reed-bed	135 (95-195)	166	28.7	1.22	19.13 (12.4-25.86) **
Scattered scrub in reed-swamp	50 (35-75)	109	18.8	2.12	33.0 (15.25-.50.75) **
Scattered scrub in fen/marsh	180 (120-260)	35	6.0	0.2	2.86 (1.17-4.55) **
Scattered scrub by open water	260 (190-335)	110	19.0	0.43	6.30 (4.15-8.45) **
Carr	590 (380-860)	26	4.5	0.04	0.66 (0.24-1.08) NS
TOTAL	8,725 (7,975-9,625)	579	100		

were mapped (i.e. areas of scattered scrub of less than about 5 m^2 were not recorded) and because a number of the singing males may have been located in these very small areas. This would tend to inflate slightly the preference indices for the scattered-scrub habitats.

Discussion

The 1996 survey located more Cetti's Warblers than had been recorded ever before in the UK. The maximum population figure of 574 (excluding the figures for Jersey) is nearly 30% higher than the estimate of around 450 from 1995 (which used data from county bird reports). The population located on Jersey, of 17-19 singing males, is roughly in line with the population estimates of around 20 given in the *Jersey Bird Reports* (1990-95).

The distribution of Cetti's Warblers in the UK now shows a strong southerly and southwesterly bias. Two-thirds of the population is located within the counties of Devon, Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset.

The population increase in the South and Southwest that has occurred since the early 1980s is likely to be due, in part, to the milder climate there. The milder winters in particular probably result in a lower winter mortality (Harvey in Lack 1986; Bibby in Gibbons *et al.* 1993) than elsewhere in the species' UK range. The population in Kent was dramatically reduced by two harsh winters in the mid 1980s. Following the 1984/85 winter, the Kent population declined by over 75% (Harvey in Lack 1986). By 1988, the Cetti's Warbler

was extinct in Kent, following a succession of severe winters, although a few territories have become re-established since 1990. Even during the 1996 survey, only six to eight singing males were located in Kent. None was found in the Stour Valley in 1996; this is surprising given that the majority of territories were located there during the initial colonisation and ensuing expansion in Kent. This suggests that, although there is much suitable habitat in Kent to support a substantial population, the cold winter weather that is regularly experienced there may be the limiting factor. Alternatively, habitat quality may have deteriorated since the 1970s, though there is no evidence of this. Cold winters may also limit the Suffolk population, where a total of four territories in 1996 contrasts with a high of 31 in 1984. The Norfolk Broads remain an apparent anomaly. This area contains the entire Norfolk population, which in 1996 was 41-48 singing males. This was slightly reduced from the population in 1995 (51 singing males), although in 1994 only 27 were recorded. The highest Norfolk count was of 63 singing males in 1984.

Populations in the south and west of Britain may also be adversely affected by bad winters. In Hampshire, a total of 125 singing males recorded in 1990 was reduced to 43 counted in 1991, following poor weather in February 1991, although the true 1991 total was estimated to be slightly higher (61), making allowance for poor coverage of a number of sites (Clark & Eyre 1993). Since then, however, the population has recovered steadily to an all-time high of 129-143 singing males in 1996. Similarly, a very cold spell during winter 1984/85 resulted in losses from previously occupied sites in Devon (Jones in Sitters 1988). The population trend in Devon since then has also shown a general, if erratic, rise. Winter 1995/96 contained a very cold spell which, in the main, appeared not to have any adverse effect on the 1996 population. At the Teifi Marshes, however, the population declined from 23 singing males in 1995 to four or five in 1996 (D. Reed verbally), and there were slight declines in Carmarthen, Norfolk, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire.

The three best sites in the UK during the 1996 survey were reed-bed sites in the south and west of England (Slapton Ley in Devon, Titchfield Haven in Hampshire and Radipole Lake in Dorset). Between them, they accounted for over 20% of the national population. The present Cetti's Warbler distribution shows similarities to the distribution of large reed-bed sites in southern England and South Wales found by the 1979 reed-bed survey (Bibby & Lunn 1982). The only counties where this did not hold true were Kent and Suffolk, although the possible reasons for this have already been discussed. Intriguingly, during winter 1995/96, two Cetti's Warblers wintered at separate sites in Lancashire. There is much suitable habitat there, but it remains to be seen whether a breeding population develops.

The results from table 3 show that Cetti's Warblers are associated with scrub, as demonstrated by several earlier studies (Harvey 1977; Bibby 1982; Cramp 1992). Over 70% of the initial territorial contacts were from scattered scrub within, or at the edge of, other habitats, in particular in those containing *Phragmites* and *Typha*. Cetti's Warblers showed a strong preference for scattered scrub within reed-swamp and reed-bed, and strongly avoided pure reed-bed and fen/marsh.

Studies have shown that the Cetti's Warbler tends to be associated with scrub on the fringes of reed-beds and other waterside places (Bibby & Lunn 1982; Bibby 1982; Tyler 1995). The drying-out of reed-beds leads to scrub invasion (Bibby & Lunn 1982; Tyler 1995) and thus to the preferred conditions for Cetti's Warblers. This situation is not helpful to other reed-bed species, in particular Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* and Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*, which require purer stands of reed, and it may be that better management of reed-beds, for example the removal of scrub, may be detrimental to the Cetti's Warbler population in the UK. Scrubby habitats, however, tend not to be in short supply in most reed-beds. There may be small local losses due to the restoration and active management of sites for the high-priority reed-bed species, but this should be offset by the creation of new reed-beds. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) target for reed-beds is to create a further 1,210 ha of new habitat by the year 2010, which is likely to be beneficial for Cetti's Warblers.

The continued expansion of the Cetti's Warbler in the UK may well be limited by climate, in particular by cold winters. The bulk of the population is found in the milder regions of southern England and South Wales. It is likely that the species will continue to thrive in these areas, especially in Devon, Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset. Any proactive management of reed-beds and other damp areas for Cetti's Warblers should be concentrated there, provided that no detrimental effect on other reed-bed species is likely.

The Cetti's Warbler was listed in *Red Data Birds in Britain* (Batten *et al.* 1990) and is currently on the amber list of the Birds of Conservation Concern because it qualifies as a rare breeding species. The threshold for this is that the average annual population is under 300 over a five-year period. This survey suggests that the species no longer fulfils this criterion; indeed, the average annual population over the last five years (1992-96) is of nearly 400 singing males. It should, however, be noted that, as the Cetti's Warbler is susceptible to harsh winters and thus prone to periodic population crashes, its status may change very quickly. There is, therefore, a need for continued monitoring of the species in order to be able to detect further signs of range expansion or to indicate whether the population may be declining and contracting. It is important for the RBBP to continue to monitor the Cetti's Warbler population.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

BOU splits Chiffchaff

With the claim of an Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus (collybita) brehmii* in Britain (at Brent Reservoir, Greater London, on 3rd June 1972) currently being assessed, the taxonomic status of this form has become relevant to the BOU Records Committee. This was considered in 1996 by *BB*, prior to the publication of our *List of Birds of the Western Palearctic* (1997), and four species were recognised (*Brit. Birds* 90: 71)—Common Chiffchaff *P. collybita*, Iberian Chiffchaff *P. brehmii*, Canary Islands Chiffchaff *P. canariensis* and Mountain Chiffchaff *P. sindianus*—following the work by Andreas Helbig *et al.* (*Ibis* 138: 650-666). The BOURC has now (January 1998) made the same four-way split; currently, only Common Chiffchaff is on the British List.

MYSTERY PHOTOGRAPHS

▲ 10. Mystery photograph 211A.

▲ 11. Mystery photograph 211B.

211 When Britain and Ireland's first Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* was discovered in Glamorgan in March 1973, there were already over 60 North American species on the British & Irish List. By January 1988, however, Ring-billed Gull had become our most numerous transatlantic visitor annually, with a British & Irish total which had reached a staggering 614, and the species had ceased to be regarded as an official rarity. Despite this demotion, Ring-billed Gull remains scarce here, and finding one in a large flock of gulls is complicated by various identification pitfalls. One such pitfall is provided by second-winter Common Gull *L. canus*, as shown in mystery photograph A, taken by Robin Chittenden in Norfolk in November 1994; mystery photograph B shows for comparison a second-winter Ring-billed Gull photographed by Tony Bond, in Merseyside in December 1987.

Though Ring-billed Gulls are larger than Common Gulls, because of the differences in sizes in both species between males and females, individuals vary from being of similar size to being noticeably bigger. The most useful structural character is the bill, which, on Ring-billed Gull, is longer, clearly thicker, of more even depth throughout its length and seemingly more blunt-tipped than that of Common Gull. Ring-billed Gull is comparatively deeper-breasted, yet more attenuated and sleeker-looking, with a less rounded head, except when relaxed like the bird in photograph B, and longer legs. It shows more pointed wing-tips than Common Gull in flight, when its marginally greater size is accentuated by comparatively longer and broader wings.

In addition to size and structural characters, second-winter Ring-billed Gull can be distinguished from second-winter Common Gull by its noticeably paler grey mantle and wings, which are almost identical in shade to those of Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus*, and its often more square-ended tertials, the white tips of which are narrower and much less contrasting than the conspicuous white crescent of Common Gull. At rest, second-winter Ring-billed Gull shows only tiny white tips to its primaries, though some second-winter Common Gulls have equally inconspicuous white tips to the primaries, and rarely reveals the single small, white 'mirror' on its outer primary, while second-winter Common Gull often displays its larger, flashing, white 'mirror' or, more usually, pair of 'mirrors' at rest. Though second-winter Ring-billed Gull usually possesses paler head markings and a yellower tone to the legs than second-winter Common Gull, and normally shows black markings on the tips of some tail-feathers and occasionally dark marks on the secondaries and tertials, these features can each be matched by individual second-winter Common Gulls, and are thus of lesser importance in the identification process.

Compared with the primaries of a second-winter Ring-billed Gull, those of an adult, like that in plate 12, possess larger white tips, a larger white 'mirror' and, usually, a second obvious white 'mirror'. In these respects, therefore, a second-winter Common Gull provides a more serious pitfall when an adult Ring-billed Gull (rather than a second-winter) is suspected. The Ring-billed Gull characters of size, structure, paler upperparts, paler head markings and yellower legs all still apply; however, the white on the tertials of adult

▲ 12. Adult Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*, Avon, November 1991 (*Barry Mitchell*)

Ring-billed Gull is even narrower and less conspicuous, and the bill is often yellow. A further feature, which is diagnostic, though visible only at moderately close range, is adult Ring-billed Gull's pale irides; on Common Gulls of all ages, these are brown-black.

In flight, an adult Ring-billed Gull shows no dark markings on the alula, primary coverts, secondaries, tertials or tail, of course, and its pale upperparts, the comparatively small amount of white within the more extensive black on its primaries and its relatively large bill and long, broad wings combine to produce an appearance not unlike that of an adult Herring Gull *L. argentatus*, rather than that of a Common Gull.

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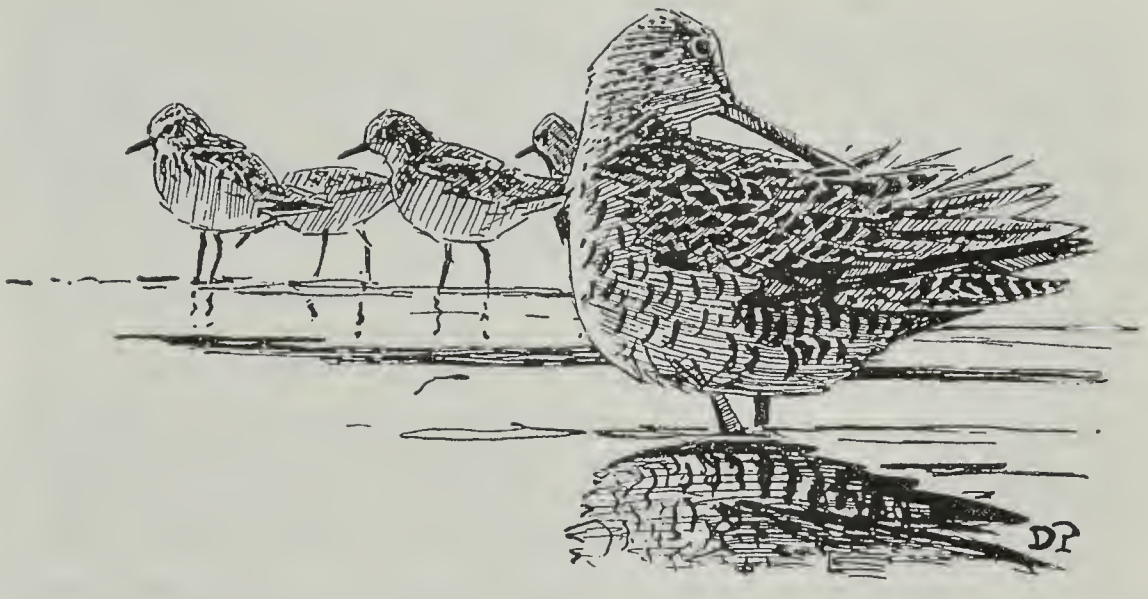

Dowitcher identification and ageing

A photographic review

R. J. Chandler

ABSTRACT All three species of dowitcher *Limnodromus* are described and illustrated in all their substantive plumages, including the three races of Short-billed *L. griseus* and the poorly known Asian Dowitcher *L. semipalmatus*. The various identification criteria for separating the two Nearctic species are reviewed, and primary projection beyond the tail is highlighted as a useful feature in all except juvenile plumages, particularly to aid identification in the 'difficult' non-breeding plumage.

There are three species of dowitcher *Limnodromus*: Short-billed *L. griseus*, Long-billed *L. scolopaceus* and Asian Dowitcher *L. semipalmatus*. Short-billed and Long-billed both breed in the Nearctic, and Long-billed also breeds in the eastern Palearctic. Both species occur as vagrants in the western Palearctic, though Long-billed is far commoner than Short-billed, of which there are very few records. The Asian Dowitcher is an eastern Palearctic breeder that has not been recorded in the western Palearctic, though it may be in the future.

The purpose of this paper is to review the field identification and ageing criteria for all three species, illustrating with photographs each distinctive

subspecies and age-class plumage. There have been several recent detailed discussions of the identification and separation of Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers (Wilds & Newlon 1983; Wilds 1990; Jaramillo *et al.* 1991; Jaramillo & Henshaw 1995), which between them cover the identification features of these two species, and it is not intended to repeat the detailed content of those papers. There is, however, no similar review that compares all three species, including Asian Dowitcher.

Breeding and migration

Short-billed Dowitcher

There are three races of Short-billed Dowitcher, which breed in separate areas in Alaska and Canada. The 'western' Short-billed Dowitcher *L. g. caurinus* breeds in coastal southern Alaska, the 'inland' Short-billed Dowitcher *L. g. hendersoni* in central Canada from southeast Yukon to Hudson Bay, and the eastern nominate race *L. g. griseus* in northern Quebec, Labrador and possibly northern Ontario. Unlike Long-billed Dowitcher, whose breeding range extends well into Asia, Short-billed breeds only within North America.

In autumn, the southward migration routes through North America reflect the breeding distribution of the three races. *L. g. caurinus* moves south through the Pacific Coast states to winter from California south to Peru. The bulk of the population of *hendersoni* migrates through the centre of the continent via the eastern Great Plains and the Great Lakes, south to coastal Texas and Louisiana, though some move east to reach the coast from about New Jersey, becoming more numerous farther south. *L. g. griseus* migrates down the eastern seaboard, with a few reaching as far west as Texas. *L. g. hendersoni* winters from Florida westwards, in the Caribbean and on both coasts of northern South America, while *griseus* winters in southern USA and from the Caribbean south to Brazil (Wilds & Newlon 1983; Hayman *et al.* 1986). Spring migration routes are similar to those taken in autumn.

Long-billed Dowitcher

The Long-billed Dowitcher breeds in western and northern Alaska and northwest Mackenzie, as well as in Siberia, where the westward range expansion reported by Tomkovich (1992) continues, breeding having now been recorded as far west as the Dudypta river basin, southwestern Taimyr Peninsula (Tomkovich 1996). In autumn, the species migrates down the Pacific coast of North America, through the Great Plains and also eastward to the Atlantic coast, where, like *L. g. griseus*, it becomes more numerous in the south, from New England to Florida. It winters in California, around the Gulf Coast, in Florida and south to Central America (Wilds & Newlon 1983; Hayman *et al.* 1986). Since its breeding range overlaps with that of Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, one cannot help wondering if some Long-billed Dowitchers might not migrate westward with the Curlew Sandpipers, rather than eastward to winter in southern North America. Spring migration is generally along more westerly routes, with few individuals appearing east of the Mississippi.

Asian Dowitcher

Asian Dowitchers breed between about 50°N and 62°N, in the valleys of the Ob and Irtysh at about 68°E in Siberia, to about 134°E in Manchuria (e.g. Sibley & Monroe 1990). They winter mainly in Southeast Asia, particularly in Sumatra, and in smaller numbers as far south as Australia, and occur regularly on passage in Hong Kong and in Thailand, and less commonly in Japan. The most westerly records of vagrants are in Aden in August 1958 (Paige 1965) and at Lake Nekuru, Kenya, in November 1966 (Smart & Forbes-Watson 1971). The size of the population is in some doubt: estimates of the World population have in the past been of the order of 5,000 individuals, but a count of about 13,000 wintering in Sumatra (Verheugt *et al.* 1990) led to the suggestion that the total population might be as high as 25,000 (Howes & Parish 1989). On migration and on their wintering grounds, Asian Dowitchers usually frequent coastal saline feeding areas.

Identification of Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers

A number of factors are discussed here; further distinctions between the two species are discussed in the plumage descriptions of Short-billed Dowitcher.

Flight pattern

Both Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers show a narrow white trailing-edge to the secondaries and inner primaries, and a white 'V' up the back. The feet extend beyond the tail, perhaps slightly less with Short-billed than with Long-billed. Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* has been reported flying with legs retracted (Grant 1983); with its similar flight pattern, such a bird might cause confusion with either of the two Nearctic dowitchers.

Structure

The three races of Short-billed Dowitcher are virtually identical in size and structure, as may be seen from published measurements (table 1). In comparison with Long-billed Dowitchers, they are slightly smaller and proportionately shorter legged, though overlap in the size of the two species renders these differences of no real value in the field, even when both species are present. Two factors, however, bill length and the relative length of the primaries, are of help, though neither is diagnostic.

As there is considerable overlap in bill-length between sexes of both species and between the species themselves, the only conclusion that can be reached is that those with the longest bills are female Long-billeds, and those with the shortest bills are male Short-billeds. A good guide is that those with bill lengths about one-and-a-half times the head length are probably Short-billeds, while those that have a bill length around twice the length of the head are likely to be Long-billeds (Cramp & Simmons 1983; Wilds & Newlon 1983). It is the experience of the Rarities Committee, however, that such judgments are prone to great variation among observers.

With regard to wing-length, table 1 shows that Short-billeds typically have

Table 1. Measurements (in mm) of the three dowitcher *Limnodromus* species. Figures are mean, (range) and sample size, where known. Data for Short-billed *L. griseus* and Long-billed *L. scolopaceus* from Cramp & Simmons 1983 (who combined adult and juvenile measurements and observed that juvenile wing averages 2 mm shorter than adult) and Hayman *et al.* 1986 (total length); and for Asian *L. semipalmatus* from Higgins & Davies 1996.

Species/race	Sex	Wing		Bill		Tarsus		Length
L. g. griseus	male	145 (142-150)	13	58.8 (54.1-63.2)	11	34.5 (33.3-36.3)	13	250-290
	female	144 (140-155)	7	56.5 (51.0-62.7)	8	34.5 (31.3-38.1)	7	(all
L. g. hendersoni	male	142 (135-150)	55	57.1 (50.8-61.2)	75	36.6 (33.8-39.3)	76	races)
	female	144 (137-152)	59	61.8 (56.2-65.9)	73	37.9 (34.0-41.3)	74	
L. g. caurinus	male	146 (142-151)	17	56.9 (51.5-61.5)	24	36.7 (33.4-40.0)	25	
	female	150 (145-155)	16	62.2 (56.6-67.7)	17	38.3 (36.8-41.2)	17	
L. scolopaceus	male	140 (133-156)	107	62.2 (55.3-69.3)	134	38.2 (34.0-41.5)	135	270-300
	female	145 (138-158)	96	72.0 (63.6-78 4)	119	41.3 (36.2-46.5)	119	
L. semipalmatus	male	177 (172-184)	8	80.2 (74.9-85.2)	24	50.7 (45.8-52.7)	14	340-360
	female	180 (177-185)	5	84.6 (78.9-90.7)	23	50.8 (47.6-54.0)	9	
	juv/imm	173 (172-175)	3	—		—		

marginally longer wings than do Long-billeds, particularly in comparison with body length, resulting in a subtle but useful structural difference between all but juveniles of the two species. As a consequence of the proportionately greater wing length, the folded wing-tips of Short-billeds usually extend at least to the tail tip, and typically 2-3 mm beyond, unlike Long-billeds, whose folded wing tips usually fall 1 mm or so short of the tail. This feature was originally noted by Nisbet (1961), though he mistakenly applied it to juveniles as well as to adults. In fact, the primaries appear to continue to grow for some months after fledging, so that it may not be until as late as December that the primary projection of Short-billeds becomes of value for identification. More recently, Jaramillo & Henshaw (1995) have drawn attention to the primary projection beyond the tail-tip to aid the separation of breeding adults of the two more easterly races of Short-billed from Long-billed Dowitcher.

Of course, care has to be taken with birds that may have moulted their longest primaries. A particular case is non-breeding summer individuals in winter-type plumage, the majority of which are presumably first-summer/second-winter. Not breeding in their first summer, they moult early to full adult winter plumage, unlike breeding adults, which may not moult until much later and may still have growing primaries into December. Thus, throughout the latter half of the year, the primary-projection criterion should be used with caution with birds in winter plumage.

Thus, in summary, observation of the primary projection beyond the tail of dowitchers in adult summer plumage is useful in confirming the species involved, though it will also be of notable value in the separation of Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers in their confusingly similar non-breeding plumages. In such plumages, care must be taken to confirm that the primaries are fully grown, which is perhaps not until December with some adults,

▶ 13. **Juvenile Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus griseus,* **Florida, USA, September 1988** (*R. J. Chandler*). Internal 'tiger-stripe' markings of scapulars and tertials are diagnostic of age and species. Relative paleness of these markings is typical of race *griseus*. Folded primary tips fall short of end of tail, but are still growing and will eventually reach just beyond tail tip.

▶ 14. **Juvenile Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus caurinus,* **moulting to first-winter, California, USA, September 1984** (*R. J. Chandler*). Richer colour of 'tiger-stripes' is typical of race *caurinus*, but width of scapular and tertial fringes is little different from the *griseus* in plate 13.

▶ 15. **First-winter Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus,* **Florida, USA, January 1987** (*R. J. Chandler*). Aged as first-winter by fresh greyish mantle and scapular feathers, and identified as Short-billed by remaining worn (pointed) juvenile 'tiger-striped' tertial. Note that, by this age, primary tips fall beyond tail, but only by 1 mm or so. Breast lightly spotted.

▶ 16. **Presumed first-summer Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus*, **Texas, USA, April 1994** (*R. J. Chandler*). In non-breeding plumage in April, this individual presumably will not breed. Not heard to call (and thus not confirmed as Short-billed), but feeding in salt water with large flock of breeding-plumaged Short-billeds. Primary tips extending beyond tail and fine spotting on white of lower breast support identification.

◀ 17. **Second-winter Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus*, **Florida, USA, September 1988** (*R. J. Chandler*). In near-complete non-breeding plumage in September. Not heard to call, but with large flock of Short-billeds in a salt-water area; spotting on white of breast also supports identification as Short-billed Dowitcher. Primary tips fall short of tail, but this likely to be result of moult, the just-visible pointed tip below longest new primary being a retained juvenile primary.

◀ 18. **Adult winter Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus*, **Florida, USA, January 1987** (*R. J. Chandler*). At same salt-water site as plate 15; lacks any juvenile scapulars or tertials and hence adult, identified as Short-billed from finely spotted breast and primary projection beyond tail.

◀ 19. **Adult summer Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus griseus*, **New Jersey, USA, date not known** (*A. & E. Morris*/Windrush). Identified as race *griseus* on basis of relatively narrow rusty upperpart fringes, extensive barring on sides of breast, and large area of white on lower breast and flanks reaching as far as vent.

◀ 20. **Adult summer Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus hendersoni*, **Texas, USA, April 1994** (*R. J. Chandler*). Identified by primary projection beyond tail, scapulars and tertials lacking white tips, and underpart pattern, and as race *hendersoni* by broadly fringed upperpart feathers, and sparsely spotted orange-peach underparts with white confined to vent.

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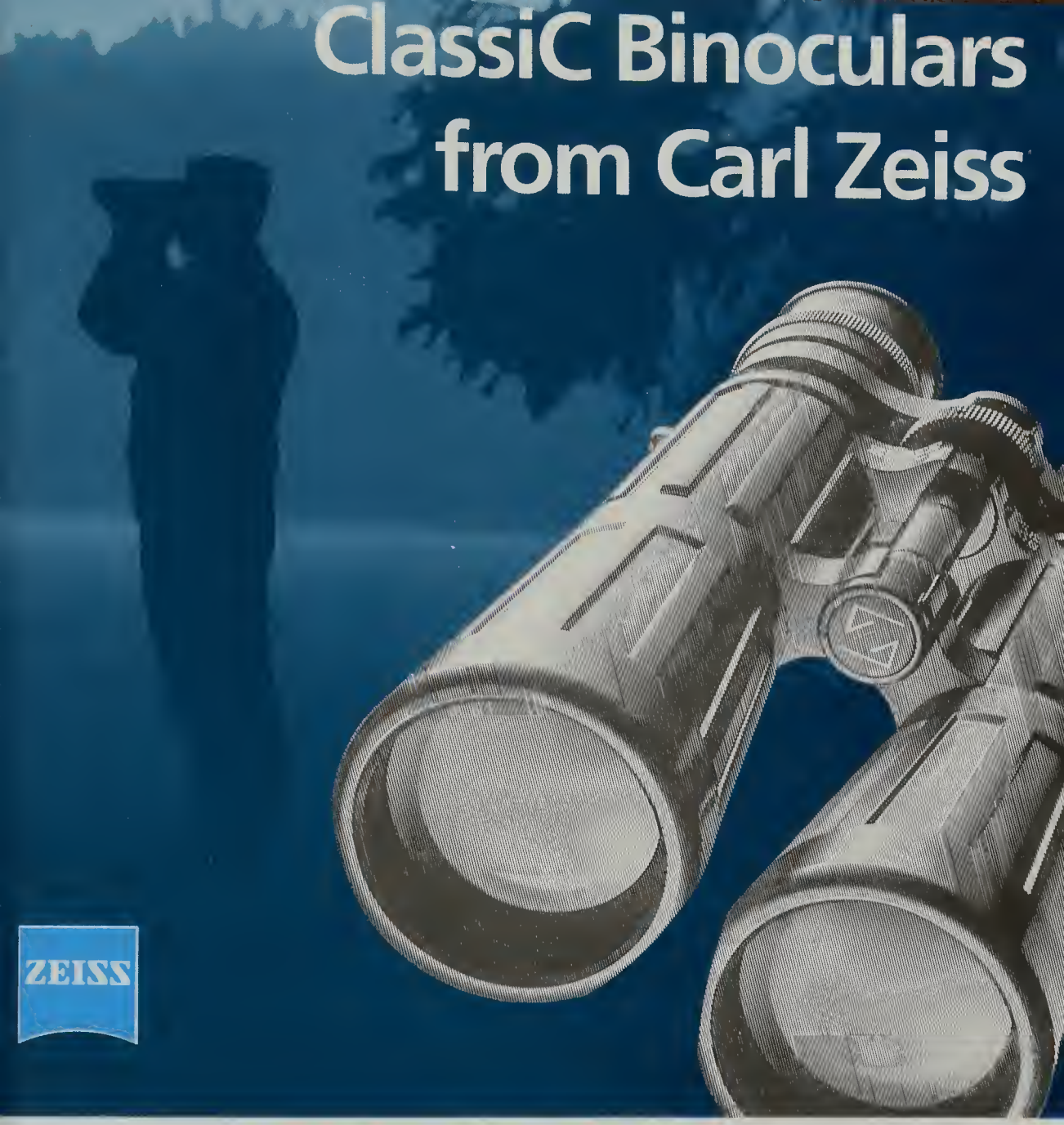

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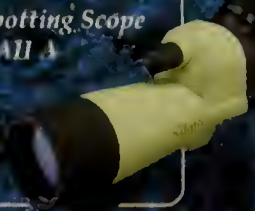

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▶ 21. **Adult summer Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus caurinus*, **California, USA, April 1992** (*R. J. Chandler*). Identified by primary projection beyond tail and by strongly spotted underparts, particularly on sides of breast, where Long-billed Dowitcher would be barred. This race most closely resembles Long-billed, and often, as with this individual, has white tips to scapulars and tertials, a feature not shared by other two races of Short-billed Dowitcher.

▶ 22. **Juvenile Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, **California, USA, September 1984** (*R. J. Chandler*). Identified and sexed as female by bill length in excess of twice head-length. Plain, dark upperparts with narrow, slightly spotted fringes to scapulars and tertials.

▶ 23. **Presumed first-summer Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, **Texas, USA, April 1994** (*R. J. Chandler*). In freshwater marsh, with adult summer Long-billed Dowitchers, though this individual did not call. Breast pattern more like Short-billed, but primary tips, cloaked by tertials, clearly fall short of end of tail; unlikely to be in primary moult at this early date, and therefore presumed to be Long-billed. Very worn wing-coverts consistent with first-summer. Bill length indicates male.

▶ 24. **Adult Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, **moulting to adult winter, California, USA, September 1984** (*R. J. Chandler*). Has classic Long-billed grey winter-plumaged breast with sharp unspotted lower border, and shows well broader dark tail bars. Though primary tips are expected to fall short of tail, is clearly in primary moult, so no conclusions can be reached regarding primary projection (or lack of it).

◀ 25. **Adult summer Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, **California, USA, April 1992** (*R. J. Chandler*). Identified to species by white tips to scapulars and tertials, broad dark barring on tail, no primary projection beyond tail, and 'keek' call when flushed. Underparts have strong dark barring on sides of breast and flanks, with broad white fringes typical of fresh summer plumage which will wear off by early June.

◀ 26. **Juvenile Asian Dowitcher** *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, **Japan, August 1986** (*T. Ishii*). Note flesh-pink base to blunt-tipped bill; among dowitchers, this is diagnostic of both age and species.

◀ 27. **Adult winter Asian Dowitcher** *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, **Western Australia, April 1995** (*R. J. Chandler*).

◀ 28. **Adult summer Asian Dowitcher** *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, **Western Australia, April 1995** (*R. J. Chandler*). Compare size and bill colour with (out-of-focus) Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica baueri* just behind. This race of Bar-tailed Godwit is slightly larger than the western Palearctic *L. l. lapponica*; also seen are Red Knots *Calidris canutus rogersi*.

though at any time one showing primary projection beyond the tail should be a Short-billed Dowitcher. Since many first-years of both species retain the diagnostic juvenile scapulars and tertials until at least December, it may be that, with care, many individuals which are largely in winter plumage can be identified during the autumn and the early part of the winter.

Calls

The single best character for distinguishing the two species is the call. Short-billed has a mellow, rapidly repeated 'tu-tu-tu', while Long-billed gives a higher-pitched, thin 'keek', sometimes singly, but often repeated several times. It is the pitch of the call, rather than the number of repetitions, that is important.

Bare-part colours

At all ages and with both species, the bill is horn-coloured, darker distally, sometimes, particularly in winter, with a yellowish base. The legs of both species are dull greenish-yellow.

Tail patterns

The tails of both Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers are barred at all ages and in all plumages. This barring is black-and-white in juvenile and non-breeding plumages, with the white often being replaced by pale rusty orange in full adult breeding plumage, but not on individuals that acquire breeding plumage in their first summer (Paulson 1993). Occasionally, the pattern may be more complex than straightforward barring. The extent and pattern of the markings shown by the two species were reviewed by Wilds & Newlon (1983) and Wilds (1990). In summary, they concluded that Short-billed Dowitcher usually has the light bars wider than the black, while on Long-billed this is never the case, and the pale bars are usually much narrower. Thus, if the tail pattern can be seen, it can provide a useful indication of the species involved, though apparently some 'western' Short-billeds are an exception to this rule (Paulson 1993).

Other factors

A further useful distinction between the two species that applies in North America, though it is less likely to be of the same value with vagrants, is the habitat in which they are found feeding. When not breeding, Short-billeds are usually encountered in saline environments (coastal mudflats and salt-marsh pools), while Long-billeds are usually found in freshwater habitats. Obviously, this distinction can apply only where they have access to both fresh and saline environments.

Identification of Asian Dowitcher

Flight pattern

Asian Dowitcher has a wide, pale (not white) trailing edge to the wing, reaching across the secondaries and the inner primaries. The back, rump,

uppertail-coverts and tail are pale but finely barred, and thus lack the contrast in flight-pattern shown by the other two dowitcher species. This flight pattern is similar to that of the eastern Palearctic race of Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica baueri*, with which it regularly associates, which has a barred rump and dark back, unlike the western race *L. l. lapponica* with its white rump and back. The underwing of Asian Dowitcher is pale and unbarred, like that of *L. l. lapponica* but quite unlike the heavily barred underwing of *L. l. baueri*.

Structure and bare-part colours

Asian Dowitchers are considerably larger than either Short-billed or Long-billed Dowitchers. In size, they are somewhat smaller than the eastern Bar-tailed Godwit, and thus will be closer to, but still smaller than, western Bar-tailed Godwit. The long, straight, parallel-sided, blunt-tipped bill is all-black in the adult, but has an extensive pale base to the lower mandible in the juvenile. When standing, the bill is held at about 30° to the horizontal. The expanded bill tip so often referred to in the literature is not particularly obvious in the field, and is best described as 'blunt-tipped'. Females are on average slightly longer billed, though there is a great deal of overlap between the sexes (table 1). The legs are proportionately longer than those of the other two dowitchers, and are grey-black at all ages.

The combination of significantly greater size, longish black legs and, in all but juvenile plumage, the prominent all-black bill and different flight pattern should easily distinguish Asian Dowitcher from both Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers. Bill shape and colour and, in flight, the lack of clear white on the rump and back and the white underwing provide separation from the western race of Bar-tailed Godwit.

Calls

Generally silent, but with a yelping 'chep-chep' or 'chowp', and a soft moaning 'kiaow' (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Higgins & Davies 1996).

Plumages

Short-billed Dowitcher

The three races show plumage differences as breeding adults, and there are also differences between juveniles of *caurinus* and those of the other two races. In adult non-breeding plumage, the races of Short-billed are inseparable in the field.

ADULT SUMMER

Adults of all races acquire summer plumage by about the end of the first third of April, and the majority of both Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers also do so in their first summer.

Race *griseus*

The main differences between the three races of Short-billed Dowitcher are the brightness of the upperparts, which is the result of the colour and width of the mantle and scapular fringes on otherwise black feathers, and, on the underparts, the degree of spotting and barring and the extent of white. On *griseus*, the upperparts are relatively dull and dark, with generally narrow fringes, grey-buff on the mantle but rather brighter, more rusty-orange on the scapulars and tertials. Internal markings on these feathers are relatively narrow and are coloured similarly to the fringes.

During the course of the summer, *griseus* changes rather little, though it does become slightly darker as a consequence of the wear of the feather fringes. On the neck and breast, there is dense dark spotting and barring (which adds to the general impression of darkness), barring dominating on the sides of the neck and breast and on the flanks, with spotting prevailing on the centre of the breast. The underparts typically have a rather dull brownish-orange ground colour which extends from the neck to the breast, and often to the flanks and undertail-coverts; the belly and vent are white. Some coloured feathers may be present on the white areas, and the flanks especially may show patches of white. The general effect in the field is of a rather dark bird with heavy underpart spotting and barring, though with a white belly and vent.

Race *hendersoni*

This is the brightest of the races, with broad rusty-yellow fringes and extensive internal markings on the mantle feathers, scapulars and tertials. Wear reduces the width of the fringes, giving a darker appearance, but the bright internal feather markings remain. The neck, breast and belly are spotted, sometimes extensively, but more usually quite sparsely, particularly on the belly, while any barring is confined to the flanks. The undertail-coverts are spotted, sometimes with some barring. The underparts are almost completely coloured, a distinctive orange-peach, any white being confined to the area of the vent. Unlike Long-billed, white fringes on the underparts in fresh plumage are narrow and quickly wear away. The general effect is of a bird with rather bright upperparts, and relatively unspotted orange-peach underparts with little if any white.

Race *caurinus*

The fringes and internal markings of the mantle feathers, scapulars and tertials are usually rusty-orange and of intermediate width compared with those of the other two races. In fresh plumage, some scapulars and tertials may have white tips, which can cause confusion with breeding Long-billed, whose scapulars and tertials have extensive white tips. On the underparts, the dark markings are rather more variable than is usually the case with the other two races, and in the extreme can approach the extensive markings of *griseus* or the sparseness of markings of some *hendersoni*; usually, the markings are close to those of typical *griseus*. The ground-colour of the underparts is similar to that of *griseus*, dull brownish-orange, with a variable extent of white on the vent and lower belly.

ADULT WINTER AND FIRST-WINTER

Individuals in this plumage provide the observer with the greatest difficulty in separating Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers. Both species have plain brown-grey upperparts, with a grey neck and upper breast, and the differences between the species are quite subtle. All three races of Short-billed Dowitcher are similar in non-breeding plumage, having the throat and upper-breast light grey, usually with sparse darker spotting and speckling on the grey areas which spills onto the white of the lower breast. Typical 'classic' Long-billeds have a near-uniform medium grey breast with a sharp lower boundary, though some individuals can appear more streaked and spotted, closer to Short-billed.

The small proportion of first-summers which are non-breeders may move north of their wintering area, but apparently they do not reach the breeding grounds and do not acquire summer plumage. Rather, they retain first-winter plumage and probably moult early to adult winter.

JUVENILE

Juveniles of all three races have a similar distinctive plumage. The upperpart feathers are dark brown with broad golden-buff fringes and extensive and quite variable internal markings. The markings are particularly obvious on the tertials, one or two of which may be retained at least until January. These strongly marked feathers are diagnostic in separating juvenile Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers, the latter having very plain feathers which give it a much darker appearance. The wing-coverts of Short-billed Dowitcher are brown with pale buff or off-white fringes. The underparts are white, with the upper breast finely streaked brown, often over a buff-brown wash, with sparse spotting and some barring on breast-sides and flanks, and spotting on undertail-coverts. The pale upperpart fringes and internal markings of *caurinus* are more rufous (e.g. Wilds & Newlon 1983) and narrower than in the other two races, though wear and fading can render these distinctions of little value in the field.

In North America, the first migrant juvenile Short-billeds move south from their natal areas in early August. Juvenile Long-billeds appear later, from mid August in the Pacific northwest and typically mid September in the east (at about the time when the first vagrant juveniles occur in western Europe), and may join flocks of juvenile Short-billeds. In mixed flocks, Short-billeds can look slightly smaller, as a result of their shorter legs, but more particularly they are brighter and paler than Long-billeds and consequently can be separated at quite long distances.

Long-billed Dowitcher

ADULT SUMMER

This plumage is acquired by about mid April. The upperpart feathers, as with Short-billed, are black, but the fringes and internal markings are cinnamon or chestnut, darker than on Short-billed. In fresh plumage (April/May), the tips of the lower rear scapulars and tertials are white, though the feather shaft is dark. This is a useful feature for separation from Short-billed, though in fresh

plumage some *caurinus* can show rather pale tips to these feathers. The underparts are darker than on any Short-billed, the ground colour being a dull orange-red. The ground colour extends from neck to vent, though in fresh plumage the feathers have extensive white fringes. These fringes wear away by early June. The sides of the breast and flanks have extensive dark barring, each feather having a single bar so that the barring is generally more obvious than on even the most strongly marked Short-billed. The neck and breast are extensively spotted.

ADULT WINTER AND FIRST-WINTER

The upperparts are plain brown-grey, though typically darker than on Short-billed Dowitcher. The underparts have the throat and upper-breast plain medium grey, with a sharp lower boundary with the white lower breast, and they generally lack the fine spotting shown by Short-billed Dowitchers.

JUVENILE

This is a much more uniform bird than juvenile Short-billed, with head and neck medium grey-brown and with an indistinct supercilium which is most obvious in front of the eye. The upperparts are a darkish grey-brown, with neat, narrow, often finely spotted pale fringes. There are often no internal markings on any feathers, but occasionally there may be faint narrow pale patterning on the tertials. The underparts are very similar to those of juvenile Short-billed, with faint dark streaking over a pale buff wash on the breast, light spotting on the flanks and heavier spotting on the vent and undertail-coverts.

Asian Dowitcher

ADULT SUMMER

Crown and lores dark brown, with forepart of supercilium often white. Upperparts fairly dark brown-grey, individual feathers having diffuse rufous-brown and/or pale grey fringes. Head, neck, breast and upper belly are chestnut-red, lower belly, vent and undertail-coverts white, with dark spotting on sides of lower belly and barring on undertail-coverts. There is dark fine spotting on lower neck and upper breast, with some rather variable dark barring on sides of breast; in fresh plumage, many of the chestnut-red underpart feathers have narrow white fringes.

ADULT WINTER AND FIRST-WINTER

A plain, uncoloured version of adult summer, lacking any trace of red on upperpart feathers and with underparts white rather than chestnut-red. Fore-supercilium white; upperpart feathers brown-grey with off-white fringes, throat and upper-breast finely streaked and spotted dark grey. Flanks and undertail-coverts with chevrons and dark bars.

It is not known if Asian Dowitchers breed in their first summer, but small numbers of first-summer individuals in winter-type plumage regularly remain during the breeding season in both Australia and Sumatra.

JUVENILE

The crown, nape and hind-neck are strongly streaked dark brown, with a dark area in front of the eye contrasting strongly with broad off-white supercilium. The upperparts are dark brown, broadly fringed pale buff on the sides of the feathers only, the dark centres reaching the feather tip. The wing-coverts are similarly fringed, but with off-white. The throat and breast are lightly streaked brown, with pale rufous-buff wash; remainder of underparts white. Bill black, but with an often extensive flesh-pink area at base of the lower mandible.

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NOTES

Cattle Egrets nesting on cliffs

In April 1988, at Ponta do Piedade, near Lagos, in the Algarve, Portugal, Ted Smith and I found a breeding colony of Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* on two islets about 75 m high and situated only about 50-100 m from the headland. All the nests were in virtually bare or grassy hollows in the very steep faces of the cliffs; some contained very bright blue eggs, and others had young which were almost fully fledged. The nests appeared to be all around the islets, facing in no particular direction, although from our vantage point we could see only the landward side. We estimated that there were 1,000-1,500 nests in these cliffs. *BWP* (vol. 1) does not mention cliff nesting by this species.

George Binns
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EDITORIAL COMMENT James Hancock has commented as follows: 'Though now nesting rarely in reedbeds, the Cattle Egret's crude nest structure suggests that this species was not originally a tree nester. It seems likely that its ancestral practice was to nest on or near to the ground, as suggested by Blaker (in Hancock & Elliott, 1978, *The Herons of the World*, page 176). The cliffs on the islets at Ponta do Piedade may therefore be an ideal safe haven for this highly adaptive species, which finds an abundance of food in this part of Portugal.'

Hen Harrier breeding success on English grouse moors

The low productivity and survival of Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* on areas of commercially managed grouse moor is not an aberrant peculiarity to the Scottish grouse moors (Etheridge *et al.* 1997).

Heather moorland is largely anthropogenic over much of the English uplands, managed almost exclusively for its sporting interests, primarily Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*, and is generically known as grouse-moor habitat. Comparisons between managed and non-managed grouse moor in relation to Hen Harrier productivity (similar to those in Etheridge *et al.* 1997) are, therefore, difficult in England. Hen Harrier co-ordinators from the six Upland/Raptor Study Groups throughout northern England have, however, worked together to monitor the mixed fortunes of breeding Hen Harriers since 1994. Although the combined data show that the number of breeding attempts (128) are few for such a large area of great potential, stemming from the paucity of breeding harriers, the results are strikingly consistent with those of the extensive eight-year Scottish study.

The fieldwork covered roughly 70% of the estimated 2,704 km^2 of suitable grouse moor in England (Hudson 1992), ranging from the Scottish Border down the Pennine chain to Derbyshire, and including the eastern moors of Northumberland, Durham and Yorkshire. The data were separated into two categories: commercially managed grouse moor, and grouse moor managed with a discernible conservation influence (i.e. nature-reserve status or a special

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protection scheme). The results (table 1) show that on grouse moor without special protection schemes only 61% of females reach the clutch stage, compared with 83% where protection schemes are incorporated into a management policy, and only 46% of clutches were successful, compared with 84%. Of territorial female Hen Harriers present on moorland in England in spring, only 28% breed successfully on commercially managed grouse moor compared with 70% on moors with special protection schemes. In both cases, these data represent the maximum nest-survival figures, as a proportion of nest attempts which fail early in the season, for whatever reason, will go undetected. Similarly, Etheridge *et al.* (1997) found only 20% of females successful on managed grouse moor compared with 60% on other moorland. The difference in productivity and survival between grouse moors and other moorland in Scotland was attributed to illegal human interference. Etheridge *et al.* (1997) speculated that, without persecution, the Hen Harrier population in Scotland would increase, initially by about 13% per annum, until a new, but unknown, equilibrium level was reached.

The conclusion of the English study is remarkably similar to that from Scotland: illegal persecution limits natural distribution and densities of Hen Harriers in the UK, a finding which has been acknowledged by game interests (e.g. Potts 1997).

Table 1. Success of female Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* monitored on grouse moors in England, 1994-97.

	COMMERCIAL GROUSE MOOR (1,767 km²)			GROUSE MOOR WITH SPECIAL PROTECTION SCHEMES (128 km²)		
Year	Territorial ♀♀	Nest attempts	Success	Territorial ♀♀	Nest attempts	Success
1997	15	11	3	11	11	8
1996	30	18	8	5	5	4
1995	26	19	8	4	4	4
1994	27	12	9	10	5	5
Totals	98	60	28	30	25	21

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the support and enthusiasm of individual observers and species co-ordinators, from the following Raptor/Upland Study Groups, our ignorance would remain unqualified; for this, I wish to record my sincere thanks and appreciation in recognition of the difficulties and frustration they endured in gathering such compelling evidence: Cumbria Raptor Study Group, Durham Upland Study Group, Lancashire Raptor Fieldworkers, Northumbria Ringing Group, North York Moors Raptor Study Group and the Yorkshire Dales Upland Study Group.

Malcolm Stott

North of England Upland/Raptor Study Groups' Hen Harrier Co-ordinator, Selbystown, Rowelltown, Carlisle, Cumbria CA6 6LY

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Potts, G. R. 1997. Comment. *Gamewise.* Autumn/winter, p. 3.

Trapped Black-headed Gulls killed by Great Cormorant

On the morning of 31st October 1993, at Mockerkin Tarn, west Cumbria, I noticed two Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* sitting very close together on the water at the edge of the tarn. On my return an hour later, they were in the same position, and a look through my telescope revealed that something was amiss: one of the gulls appeared reasonably healthy, but the other, its head drooping and its bill slightly open, was not in good condition. Suddenly, the healthier individual began to flap and peck at the other in an attempt to escape, as it was now obvious that the two had somehow become tangled together, perhaps with fishing line; several times the gull made desperate attempts to free itself, but its efforts were becoming weaker. The pair had by then drifted into open water near the middle of the tarn, and it was there that a bizarre twist in the fate of the two took place. A Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* swam over to investigate the commotion, circled the gulls a couple of times and, to my surprise, then proceeded to attack the more sickly of the two, quickly killing it with a lunge to its head and neck; it then attacked the other gull, but this individual, being slightly more vigorous, did not succumb until the cormorant gripped it behind the head and forced it underwater several times. Within minutes both gulls had been killed, and the cormorant swam off to resume fishing, leaving the corpses to be investigated briefly by two Moorhens *Gallinula chloropus*.

Cormorants and gulls regularly come into close contact, but I had never seen a Great Cormorant make a prolonged attack on a gull. Perhaps, in this instance, the gulls' hopeless predicament triggered the aggression?

Derek McAlone
88 Whinlatter Road, Mirehouse, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 8DQ

LOOKING BACK

Twenty-five years ago: 'The name of Witherby has been inseparably linked with *British Birds* since the journal's foundation in 1907. H. F. Witherby, who conceived the original idea and secured the support of his fellow ornithologists for its launching, supplied the main editorial drive and inspiration and also acted as its printer and publisher for many years. The firm of H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd has [now] decided to transfer the ownership of *British Birds* from 1st April to Macmillan Journals Ltd, a member of the Macmillan Group . . . The editors, who have been consulted throughout by both parties, are satisfied that the new publishers share fully their aspirations for *British Birds*.

'The high regard in which *British Birds* is held, not only in Britain but also abroad, is due to the standard set by its editors. It is perhaps not as fully appreciated as it should be how much of their time such eminent ornithologists as Bernard Tucker, Max Nicholson, Phil Hollom and Stanley Cramp have given to the journal. All immensely able and active in other spheres, they have always found time to devote energy and vision to *British Birds*. And for over two decades James Ferguson-Lees, in a full-time or part-time capacity, has edited the journal with scholarship and distinction. It has been a real pleasure for me, representing the publishers, to work with such gifted people. [Antony Witherby]' (*Brit. Birds* 66: 90-91, March 1973)

Also in March 1973, Rob Hume discovered Britain's first Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* at Blackpill, Swansea Bay, West Glamorgan (*Brit. Birds* 66: 509-517).

LETTERS

Kittiwake versus Great Skua

The lead story in November's 'News and comment' on 'Kittiwake versus Great Skua' (*Brit. Birds* 90: 530) suggested that predation by Great Skuas (Bonxies) *Catharacta skua* on Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* is a recent phenomenon. Not so! Bonxies killing and eating Kittiwakes is nothing new.

I spent 16 days on the isle of Foula in 1948. This happened to coincide with the visit of Pat and Ursula Venables, who were collecting material for their book (1955, *Birds and Mammals of Shetland*). Severe predation by Bonxies on Kittiwakes and young Arctic Skuas *Stercorarius parasiticus* is described in my paper on Foula (*Scot. Nat.* (1948): 157-163) and even more vividly by the Venableses.

Henry Saxby, writing in 1861 (1874, *The Birds of Shetland*), said of the Great Skua '. . . killing birds as large as a gull', and, even earlier, in 1684, Sibbald (*Scotia Illustrata*, translation by Mullens, *Brit. Birds* 6: 34-57) described the Great Skua as 'A rapacious bird, and devours Teal [*Anas crecca*] and birds of like size.'

IAN D. PENNIE
5 Badcall, Scourie, Sutherland IV27 4TH

Juvenile plumage of Northern Mockingbird

In P. R. Cobb's account of the Norfolk Northern Mockingbird (*Brit. Birds* 89: 347-356), the statement was made 'Its plumage was not perfect, and we considered that it must have been a juvenile.'

The juvenile (or, as I prefer, juvenal) plumage of the Northern Mockingbird is distinctive in that it is profusely spotted on the underparts. The individual in the photograph on p. 65 of vol. 3 of the *Master Guide to Birding* (Farrand 1983) has less spotting than average, whereas the spots are exaggeratedly heavy in the illustration on p. 337 of the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (2nd edn, 1987), which also erroneously shows a yellow rather than brownish-grey iris.

KENNETH C. PARKES
Curator Emeritus of Birds, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, 4400 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213-4080, USA

Abnormal Robin song

I was intrigued by the observations on the abnormal song of a Robin *Erithacus rubecula* reported by J. S. A. Hunter (*Brit. Birds* 90: 288-289). I can envisage other mechanisms for the bird to have not acquired its normal song. The facts that it was singing in opposition to other Robins, however, and 'had evidently acquired a territory' raise further questions.

 [*Brit. Birds* 91: 110-113, March 1998] © British Birds Ltd 1998

The first point is how did the rival birds recognise that the song came from a Robin? Did the few single notes that were 'of undoubted Robin provenance' do the trick? Alternatively, were the rival Robins kept away only from the immediate vicinity of the song-posts used by the bird, where it could be seen?

Had the bird survived to the breeding season, would the very simple song be recognised by female Robins, and could the bird, if male, have attracted a mate? Would the lack of song quality disadvantage it so much that it would be excluded from breeding? If it was female, would it have had the same discriminatory facilities as other Robins, or would it have 'fallen for' another Robin with a simple song?

Indeed, are we dealing with a tone-deaf bird? Or a bird which was temporarily deaf at the crucial time when the song phrases should have been learnt? I think it very unlikely that the bird was deaf, from the observations recorded. Finally, might everything be explained if the bird were brain-damaged so that it was functioning normally, but unable to control the sounds it uttered? This exceptional bird certainly poses a wealth of questions that will probably never be answered.

Chris Mead
The Nunnery, Hilborough, Thetford, Norfolk IP26 5BW

The Missing Rarities—not in the UAE!

A few sceptical eyebrows have been raised over our bird-recording methods here in the UAE. To clear our name (amongst 'present-day readers' and for 'posterity'), let me emphasise that we are by no means relaxed in our bird-recording approach and there should be no cause for alarm.

The review of our cherished *Emirates Bird Report No. 19* (*Brit. Birds* 90: 298) focussed on our missive that recording procedures in the UAE are flexible, not allowing the odd 'technicality' to get in the way of a good record.

This is absolutely true; we treat every rare-bird report on its own merit, a method which works well in a small country such as ours, whose diverse bird records rely almost entirely on ten resident birders and a handful of tour groups annually. By adopting a friendly and pragmatic approach, we find that birdwatchers at all levels of expertise are less intimidated and more likely to report their finds. The credibility of an observer can often be assessed on a personal level and this brings results. Our phraseology may be deliberately vague, but this flexibility means that more reports pass through our hands and we are able to focus on the important reports and coax more detail from those observers. Duff records? We do not think so. In fact, we are likely to have a higher density of good records than most countries.

The parable of the Missing Rarities (*Brit. Birds* 90: 164, 299)? Well, they are not in the United Arab Emirates.

Colin Richardson
UAE Bird Recorder, Emirates Bird Records Committee, PO Box 50394, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

The report of the Rarities Committee

While I found the latest report of the British Birds Rarities Committee (*Brit. Birds* 90: 453-522) to be generally informative reading, Rob Hume's introductory remarks on 'competition' between the Committee and others are in places confused and misleading.

On the work of the Committee, he states that 'there is still a feeling of duplication, even competition at times, where some magazines and individuals are concerned' and goes on to ask 'Why are there so many listings titled "British bird report" . . .?', with the subsequent implication that such a listing takes upon itself to accept and reject records. There is only one listing entitled British Bird Report: this imprint appears under copyright each month only in *Birdwatch* magazine and is a compilation of recently reported bird sightings, not a judgment on the authenticity or otherwise of rarity claims. Each issue clearly states that 'sightings featured here are news reports, not fully authenticated records, and are subject to ratification by the appropriate records committees'.

Aside from *British Birds*, *Birdwatch* is the only ornithological periodical which publishes the name and address of the British Birds Rarities Committee's secretary each month, together with those of his Irish counterparts, alongside a request for the submission of rarity descriptions. Contrary to Rob Hume's assertion that records are accepted and rejected, this and other reports published in the same section of *Birdwatch* not only endorse the current national and local record-assessment systems, but actively encourage birders to submit their records to them.

Anyone reading the introduction to the Rarities Committee's report could easily be left with the misconception that this particular listing is somehow in competition with the long-standing national system of records acceptance. While this may well be true of other publications and individuals, it is plainly not so in our publication which the report has chosen to reference. To further the cause of co-operation that Rob Hume refers to, the Committee would be much better advised to acknowledge, rather than attack, the assistance it receives from its supporters elsewhere.

DOMINIC MITCHELL
Publisher and Editor, Birdwatch *magazine, Bow House, 153-159 Bow Road, London E3 2SE*

EDITORIAL COMMENT Rob Hume has replied as follows: 'Dominic Mitchell's letter and this response multiply the space devoted to this point by several times, giving it more weight than I intended. I should, however, have been more careful with my wording: "British bird report" (without the capital initials of the *Birdwatch* version) was a generic term, not pointing to any specific publication, and I apologise for any misunderstanding. The fact that Dominic regards such a title as copyright, however, indicates part of the competitive element to which I refer and adds an air of authority, intended or not, whatever disclaimers appear in the small print. Also, committee or no committee, someone decides what to put in and what to leave out, so there is also a small element of assessment. What I really wished, however, was to

re-emphasise (especially to people who have not "grown up" with the system over many years) our desire to avoid the situation often alluded to in a boxing context: three or four "authorities" each with a "World Champion", when it is patently obvious that there can be only one. If we regard rare-bird recording as a science, we should all work towards a single set of data; if it is a game, then at least we should play by some agreed rules. The fact that the Rarities Committee was created by and has always worked through *British Birds* introduces questions of "ownership" and the inclusion of reports, whatever they are entitled, adds a competitive commercial edge to the magazines, but the Committee is uniquely placed as a body elected by birdwatchers to serve themselves and ornithology, and any rival, unelected system of assessment is surely to be discouraged. Debate and argument about rare birds and identification have always gone on and should be encouraged, but in recent years they have taken on an unwelcome divisive and antagonistic tone: whether other publications reflect the public mood or try to lead it towards dissent (stirring, in other words) is for others to decide. Once again, though, I am happy to acknowledge the support and commitment to the present system expressed by *Birdwatch*; and there is always the possibility of updating the system, democratically, if that is what people want.'

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bird photographs and digital images

Most bird-photographers welcome the advent of digital-imaging technology and the opportunity it provides to remove unwanted blemishes from a photograph. Such blemishes include obtrusive out-of-focus vegetation or similar features which obstruct the main subject in a photograph, or those annoying scratches that always seem to appear on the best shot of a series. Manipulation of digital images, however, also provides opportunities that might at best confuse a viewer (perhaps adjusting a background, thus showing the species out of its usual habitat), or at worst are either scientifically incorrect (as would be the case if modifications were made to the plumage) or even downright dishonest.

We wish to make *BB*'s position clear in this matter. First, we shall not knowingly publish photographs which have been digitally manipulated, without a clear statement to us from the photographer as to what has been done, which statement we will repeat, probably briefly, in the caption to the photograph. Secondly, since digital manipulation has particular implications so far as the 'Bird Photograph of the Year' competition is concerned, we shall not knowingly accept any digital images for this competition.

Christmas puzzle 'Scilly twitch': the solution

MANZANILLA
LA GITANA

There were 94 people at the twitch drawn by John Hollyer, 53 of them with binoculars, 26 with telescopes and eight of them actually looking at the Northern Parula *Parula americana*.

Nobody got all four counts correct.

The three closest entrants were John Spottiswood (103, 64, 24 and 15), R. B. Millar (91, 45, 7 and 8) and J. F. Sims (94, 46, 14 and 20).

Each of the three winners will receive a case of *La Gitana* sherry from the competition's sponsors, *Vinicola Hidalgo SA*.

REVIEWS

A Field Guide to Warblers of North America.

By Jon Dunn & Kimball Garrett.

Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1997. 656 pages; 32 colour plates; 141 colour photographs; 60 colour maps; 13 line-drawings. ISBN 0-395-38971-2 cloth £17.95; ISBN 0-395-78321-6 paperback £11.95.

North American wood-warblers hold a special place in birders' hearts on both sides of the Atlantic. For Americans, they are the rainbow-coloured sprites that light up spring and the identification puzzles of the fall. In Europe, their autumn vagrancies have become nationally newsworthy items. The commotion created in 1989 when the Western Palearctic's first Golden-winged Warbler *Vermivora chrysoptera* generated the biggest twitch in history epitomises the magnetism of this fascinating group of birds.

If ever a work took on the aura of its subject matter, then it is this gem of a publication. Small, compact, brightly coloured, simply opening its pages will have the reader salivating.

In brief, the book covers the 18 genera which occur in North America, comprising 60 species, including the 23 that have occurred in the Western Palearctic. Each species is investigated thoroughly, with sections on voice, behaviour, habitat, distribution and conservation. The bulk of the text, however, concentrates on identification. Each plumage phase and moult is discussed at length and comparisons with similar species are made. Colour photographs are used liberally to illustrate the subtle seasonal, sexual and age differences that make this group so fascinating and, to the front of the book, there are 31 exquisite colour plates from the brushes of Thomas R. Schultz and Cindy House, in the style of the old master himself, the late Roger Tory Peterson, and annotated with his celebrated pointer identification system.

One tiny criticism: condensing so many data in 656 pages has been achieved only by using a print size that strains the eyes, especially in field conditions.

This is a classic and, to use the words of that consummate American, Homer J. Simpson: 'Mmmmm . . . Warblers!'

Stuart Winter

Where to Watch Birds in the London Area.

By Dominic Mitchell.

Christopher Helm Publishers, London, 1997. 240 pages. ISBN 0-7136-3868-0. Paperback £12.99.

This guide covers 47 principal and 27 minor sites in the area bounded by the M25. Each main entry is organised under five headings: 'Habitat', 'Species', 'Timing', 'Access' and 'Calendar'. There are clear maps for each of the main sites, a checklist, an index of species (but not of sites) and attractive line-drawings by Jan Wilczur.

The style is easy, yet concise, giving a well-researched, accurate and often evocative 'feel' both of the sites and their birds. I detected no obvious omissions, but question whether it is appropriate to include Perry Oaks, when the author acknowledges that public access is impossible and likely to remain so. The stated purpose 'to guide the reader around the foremost birding sites in London' is amply met and even the most active London birdwatcher should learn something about London's birds from this book.

P. J. Oliver

ALSO RECEIVED

The Book of Nightingales. By Richard Mabey. (Sinclair-Stevenson, London, 1997. 2nd edn. 131 pages. ISBN 1-85619-693-3. £12.99)(New title, formerly *Whistling in the Dark: in pursuit of the Nightingale*; review: *Brit. Birds* 86: 636)

British Birds: their folklore, names and literature. By Francesca Greenoak. (Christopher Helm Publishers, London, 1997. 3rd edn. 239 pages. ISBN 0-7136-4814-7. Paperback £14.99)(New title, formerly *All the Birds of the Air*; review *Brit. Birds* 72: 495)

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NEWS AND COMMENT

Compiled by Bob Scott and Wendy Dickson
Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'

YOY winners

▲ 29. YOUNG ORNITHOLOGISTS OF THE YEAR 1997. Foreground, left to right, Robert Martin (joint Intermediate Winner), Matthew Harding (Senior Winner), Matthew Slaymaker (Junior Winner) and Jonathan Dean (joint Intermediate Winner); background, Robert Gillmor and JTRS (*Derek Toomer/BTO*)

The presentations to the 1997 winners of the title Young Ornithologists of the Year were made at the BTO Annual Conference at Swanwick, Derbyshire, on 6th December 1997 (plate 29). As well as inscribed certificates, the winners received books from the publisher sponsors (*Christopher Helm, Hamlyn, HarperCollins, OUP, Pan Macmillan, Pica Press* and *T. & A. D. Poyser*), binoculars from the optical sponsors (*Swarovski*) and birdwatching jackets from *Barbour*, and the BTO provided the Senior Winner with a free place at the weekend conference. The Senior Winner received his certificate and set of *HarperCollins* field guides from *BB*'s Managing Editor, and the other winners were presented with their *Swarovski* binoculars by John Brinkley, Sales & Marketing Manager, Optik & Swareflex Division, Swarovski UK Ltd.

It is not too late for young birdwatchers aged 10-21 to enter the 1998 competition (all that is needed is a genuine field notebook submitted by 1st September). Write for a copy of the full rules to Mrs Sheila Cobban, British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

1,111

That's the number of globally threatened bird species, and those—not a single species or a single area—are the target for the 1998 British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water this August.

Last year's attendance was up 34% and profits up 45%, and Dr Mike Rands of BirdLife International received a cheque for £60,000 from Tim Appleton and Martin Davies, the Birdwatching Fair organisers, towards the forest project in Ecuador, and also a £12,000 cheque from the organisers of the 1997 Birdrace, which is now run by *Birdwatch* magazine.

Tim Appleton and Martin Davies made the dramatic prediction that they will be presenting a cheque for at least £100,000 in December this year. Let's all cross our fingers that August weather will once again be kind to the Fair.

Whipcracking nightjars?

We all know that the bleating noise made by a drumming Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* is not vocal, but is caused by its tail-feathers vibrating. Peter Gath has now stated that the sharp, 'wing-clapping' noise made in flight by a European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* is not, as often stated, caused by the wings being struck together over the back, but is equivalent to the crack of a whip or the crackle of a flag flapping in a strong wind (*Limicola* 11: 298-300). The 'wing-clapping' of a Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* near the top of its display flight has similarly been attributed to 'forcible downstrokes analogous to the crack of a whip, but . . . is more likely to be due to the wings striking each other' (Campbell & Lack 1985, *A Dictionary of Birds*).

Sheringham Bird Observatory

Not an accredited observatory, but with all the qualifications that it needs to provide excitement and a sense of discovery for its team of observers and enjoyment for the readers of its *Report*. We especially enjoyed the daily log entries, which are reproduced in full for some 60 days: an original idea, which other coastal stations might like to copy.

The *Report for 1996* costs £6.50 (+ £1 p&p) from the SBO at 20 Abbey Park, Beeston Regis, Sheringham, Norfolk NR26 8SP.

Eric Hosking Trust bursaries

The Eric Hosking Trust has awarded two £500 bursaries: to Michaela Farkasovska for work on the conservation of the Morava River floodplain in Slovakia and to Dr Mark Bolton for work in Portugal on the criteria for ageing European Storm-petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus*.

For further details of these awards and of how to apply for a bursary, write to The Eric Hosking Charitable Trust, Pages Green House, Wetheringsett, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 5QA.

Getting newcomers to join in

Congratulations to the Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society on its original amendment to the popular New Year's Day birdwatch rules whereby the inclusion of a young birdwatcher (or non-CAWOS member) qualifies a team to add two bonus points to its final species tally.

Ten teams entered this year's event (on 4th January), sponsored by *Birdline North West* and named 'The Great CAWOS Yule Log', and the winners achieved a score of exactly 100.

Next year's Yule Log will be held on 2nd/3rd January 1999. For details, contact Mike Holmes, 114 Merlin Way, Coppenhall, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 3RZ.

Dartford Warblers in Somerset

Dartford Warblers *Sylvia undata* were discovered breeding on the Quantocks in 1991, on the Mendips in 1993 and on Exmoor in 1995. By 1996, the total had risen to about 30 pairs. These populations occupy upland heath, unlike the traditional Dorset/Hampshire lowland heaths. They have, therefore, a significance beyond Somerset, as perhaps an indication that the species may colonise similar areas throughout southern Britain. The full account, by James J. Packer and Peter J. Knight, appears in *Somerset Birds 1996* (pp. 126-129), the eighty-third annual report of the Somerset Ornithological Society, edited by Brian Gibbs.

For details of the SOS, contact the Hon. Membership Secretary, E. M. Seaman, 2 Cothelstone Close, Durleigh, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 7JH; phone 01278 451368.

Brinkmanship

The BTO's December Swanwick conference is an institution. The latest one, on 5th-7th December 1997, was on the theme of 'Birds on the Brink', with declining species such as the Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* (Dr David Thomson) and Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* (Dr Ken Smith) and the word 'biodiversity' (Dr Jeremy Greenwood, Dr Simon Lyster and Graham Wynne) and the phrase 'global warming' (Stephen Moss and Dr Humphrey Crick) much to the fore.

In between, Dr Mike Harris's Witherby Memorial Lecture showed that, far from being a boring beast that sits around idly when not catching sandeels, the Common Guillemot *Uria aalge* is a fascinating bird.

Finally, a heavyweight contest between Dr Mark Avery (RSPB) and Dr Dick Potts (Game Conservancy Trust) revealed remarkable agreement on what the evidence showed and what needed to be achieved, if not precisely how to go about it, to resolve the conflict between raptors (especially Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* and Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus*) and those who want to shoot lots of Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* every autumn.

In lighter vein, a West Palearctic Bird Quiz run by Dr Alan Knox was a great success, won by a team including senior Young Ornithologist of the Year, Matthew Harding; a more serious written quiz was won by David Stroud; and Matthew Harding featured again, winning the draw for the bottle of champagne in *BB*'s mystery photos quiz, in which eight of the 120 entrants named all five birds correctly (Kelvin Britton, John Callion, Humphrey Crick, Mike Denton, Simon Collings, Ray Hallam, Matthew Harding and Dick Newell).

Attendance was up on recent years, with 300 participants, but 294 were old Swanwick hands, and half of the few newcomers were invited speakers. Those who did not attend missed a great conference, sponsored this year by the Austrian optical company *Swarovski*.

Shetland quizzes

'What was the key factor behind the range expansion and population increase of the Spotless Starling [*Sturnus unicolor*] in Spain between 1950 and 1990?'

'Every member of what two "sets" of birds, each with only three species in the world, have occurred in Shetland?'

The latter question is one of ten which could win a Shetland Bird Club member 'a unique ornithological treasure dating back 500 years (no it's not Nick Dymond's first pair of bins).' We wonder what it *is*?

The first question reveals the SBC's (or *SBC Newsletter* editor, Martin Heubeck's) interest in quizzes, for it is one of another ten questions within a review of *The EBBC Atlas of European Birds* recently published by T. & A. D. Poyser.

The SBC probably does welcome new members, but the *Newsletter* still does not give any address for its Membership Secretary, George Petrie. You had better write to Martin Heubeck, East House, Sumburgh Head Lighthouse, Virkie, Shetland ZE3 9JN.

'Welsh Birds'

Compared with the long-established *British Birds* (1907) and *Scottish Birds* (1960) and even the more recent *Irish Birds* (1977), the Welsh Ornithological Society's *Welsh Birds* is the newcomer. It is, however, a refereed journal, with high-quality papers and interesting notes. It deserves to be in every serious ornithological library. It is edited by Michael Shrubb, and librarians should note the ISSN: 1359-1649.

Issues are published twice annually, in June and December, and currently cost £4.00. Membership Secretary of the WOS is Dr D. K. Thomas, Laburnum Cottage, 12 Manselfield Road, Murton, Swansea SA3 3AR.

Help needed in Moravia

During 7th-10th July 1997, a 2-m flood struck the Moravian Ornithological Station (Moravská Ornitologická Stanice) in the Czech Republic, destroying 90% of the 6,000 bird specimens and 50% of the ornithological books and periodicals. Damage amounted to about £107,000.

The Station is appealing for sponsors who can help—not only by large donations, but also in 'even tiny' ways—so that the reference collections can be restored. Anyone who has surplus bird books, journals or magazines is asked to send them to Dr František Hanák, Head of MOS, Museum Komenského, 751 52 Přerov, Horní náměstí č 1, Czech Republic.

A career in conservation?

The RSPB's Youth Unit has published a booklet—*Careers in Conservation*—which gives advice on choosing the right subjects to study both at school and in higher education, with details of college and university courses and a comprehensive list of contact addresses for a variety of conservation organisations. It also gives advice on where to look for jobs on the Internet, and how to survive that crucial interview.

Copies of *Careers in Conservation* are available (price £5, incl. p&p) from the RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

YOC magazine wins award

Congratulations to Mark Boyd, editor of *Bird Life*, the bi-monthly wildlife magazine of the YOC, which has won a *BBC Wildlife* Award as the best environmental charity children's publication. This is the second major award won by *Bird Life*: in 1987, it won the Periodical Publishers Association Award for 'consumer periodical of the year'.

As YOC national organiser, Peter Holden, has pointed out, the YOC is now the World's biggest wildlife club for young people, more than a million of whom have been members since the Club was launched in 1965.

Wildbrain of Britain 1998

What do wallabies and sea-horses have in common? Which birds are named after St Peter, and why?

The BBC Natural History Unit is seeking contestants, able to answer such questions, for its Radio 4 quiz. For an application form, send an SAE to Wildbrain, BBC Natural History Unit, Broadcasting House, Whiteladies Road, Bristol BS8 2LR. The deadline for applications is 31st March.

Stag Beetle survey

A survey of Britain's largest native beetle, the spectacular Stag Beetle *Lucanus cervus*, is being carried out in spring and summer 1998. For further details and an information leaflet, please contact the People's Trust for Endangered Species at 15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BG; phone 0171 498 4533; fax 0171 498 4459.

Changes at 'Natural World'

After 17 successful years, Linda Bennett has stepped down as Editor of the Wildlife Trusts' *Natural World*. The magazine has been published by The Illustrated London News Group since its inception, but will now be moving to River Publishing.

Always a good friend of *BB*, we wish Linda all the best in her future endeavours.

Records from the Korean Peninsula

Jürgen Fiebeg is compiling information for *A New Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Korean Peninsula*. Reports or bird lists of any trips to North or South Korea are requested, as are any data concerning skin collections. All contributions will be acknowledged by letter and in print on publication. Please write to Jürgen Fiebeg, Museum of Natural History/Institute of Systematic Zoology, Invalidenstr. 43, D-10115 Berlin, Germany.

Mongolian records

Axel Bräunlich is compiling a paper on the distribution and status of birds in Mongolia. Reports or bird lists of any trips to Mongolia are requested. All contributions will be acknowledged by letter and in print. Please send material to Axel Bräunlich, Brüsseler Str. 46, 13353 Berlin, Germany; e-mail nabu-ostko@ipnb.comlink.apc.org

Bird Nesters' Club

The statement by the Club's Chairman, Peter Castell, in vol. 1 no. 1 of *Nidus*, the bi-annual bulletin of the BNC, expresses the hope that 'it may be possible to remove the stigma surrounding bird-nesting which has resulted from the activities of egg collectors' and 'By encouraging bird-nesters to publish information, set-up their own studies and to participate in national surveys such as those organised by the British Trust for Ornithology . . . to benefit the conservation of birds.'

We hope that this new club will keep a very close eye on its own members' activities, in relation to not only the law and licence requirements in this country, but also their behaviour abroad. Perhaps a code of conduct, such as those already established for birdwatchers, twitchers, fossil-hunters and others, would help to reassure those who view nest-finding as the ornithological equivalent of 'casing the joint'.

Robin Khan MBE

In the New Year Honours, Robin Khan was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire. A familiar name to all West Country birdwatchers and fellow raptor experts, Robin's concern with conservation has linked well with his career with the Forestry Commission. As Chief Conservation Ranger for the South and West of England, he was responsible for the creation of the Halden Forest viewpoint for Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* and other birds of prey.

New Recorders

Dave Odell, 74 The Links, Kempston, Bedford MK42 7LT, previously jointly responsible with Martin Palmer, is now sole Recorder for Bedfordshire.

Andrew Moon, 46 Highfield Way, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire WD3 2PR, has taken over from Mark Hardwick as Recorder for London.

Steve Keller, 17 Suffolk Avenue, Beeston Rylands, Nottingham NG9 1NN, has taken over from J. A. Hopper as Recorder for Nottinghamshire.

MONTHLY MARATHON

SUNBIRD

The bunting *Emberiza* (*Brit. Birds* 90: plate 208) was named as Cirl *E. cirlus* (52%), Yellowhammer *E. citrinella* (29%), Rustic *E. rustica* (10%), Pine *E. leucocephalos* (5%) and Yellow-breasted *E. aureola* (4%). It was a female Cirl Bunting, photographed in Spain in 1995 by Roger Tidman.

The three leading competitors (Stephen Foster, David McAdams and Richard Patient) all identified it and each advances to a total of 16 correct answers.

For a free SUNBIRD brochure, write to PO Box 76, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1DF; or telephone Sandy (01767) 682969.

▲ 30. **'Monthly marathon'**. Photo no. 139. Nineteenth stage in ninth 'Marathon'. Identify the species. *Read the rules* (*Brit. Birds* 90: 66), then send in your answer on a postcard to Monthly Marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ, to arrive by 15th April 1998.

RECENT BBRC DECISIONS

ZEISS

This monthly listing of the most-recent decisions by the British Birds Rarities Committee is not intended to be comprehensive or in any way to replace the annual 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain'. The records listed are mostly those of the rarest species, or those of special interest for other reasons. All records refer to 1997 unless stated otherwise.

ACCEPTED. **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybridus* Buckden Gravel-pits (Cambridgeshire), 2nd May; Cley (Norfolk), 20th June. **Snowy Owl** *Nyctea scandiaca* Drimsdale, South Uist (Outer Hebrides), 28th June. **Pallid Swift** *Apus pallidus* Mundesley (Norfolk), 28th August. **Little Swift** *A. affinis* Fetlar (Shetland), 29th May. **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** *Merops superciliosus* Bressay, Asta, Tingwall Valley and Lerwick area (Shetland), 20th June to 3rd July. **Peehora Pipit** *Anthus gustavi* Fair Isle (Shetland), 26th-29th September. **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* Farlington Marshes (Hampshire), 6th July to 6th September 1996; Brandon Marsh (Warwickshire), 18th May. **Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* Hartlepool Headland (Cleveland), 18th-19th May. **Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus* Locality in Leicestershire, 19th October. **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* Kilnsea, 21st-28th October; same, Spurn (Humberside), 24th-25th October. **Lanceolated Warbler** *Locustella lanceolata* Landguard, 26th September. **River Warbler** *L. fluviatilis* Linford Gravel-pits (Buckinghamshire), 15th-16th June. **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* Thatcham (Berkshire), 7th September. **Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi* Spurn, 19th October; Holkham Meals (Norfolk), 22nd October. **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* Ethie Mains (Angus & Dundee), 31st May to 1st June. **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* Spurn, 23rd September. **Lesser Grey Shrike** *L. minor* Isle of May (Fife), 1st-2nd June. **Rosy Starling** *Sturnus roseus* Kilnsea and Spurn, 27th-28th September. **Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas* Baltasound, Unst (Shetland), 16th-23rd May.

M. J. Rogers, Secretary, BBRC, 2 Churchtown Cottages, Towednack, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3AZ

RECENT REPORTS

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan

This summary covers the period from 5th January to 15th February 1998. These are unchecked reports, not authenticated records.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* Female, North Slob (Co. Wexford), 25th January to 15th February. **Bufflehead** *Bucephala albeola* Female, Macroom (Co. Cork), 18th January to 15th February. **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* Martin Mere (Lancashire), Marshside Marsh (Merseyside) and two at Banks (Lancashire) during 14th January to 15th February; Macroom, 12th February. **Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus* About six first-winters of race *smithsonianus* in Ireland, including two at Killybegs (Co. Donegal) on 12th February. **Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus cachinnans* Near-adult of nominate race at Belfast City Dump (Co. Antrim), 13th February (potential first record for Ireland). **Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* St Mary's (Scilly), 15th February. **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Lodmoor (Dorset), 23rd-28th January. **Spotless Starling** *Sturnus unicolor* St Mary's, 31st January to 15th February (potential first record for Britain & Ireland). **Two-barred Crossbill** *Loxia leucoptera* Parkend, Forest of Dean (Gloucestershire), 15th February. **Dark-eyed Junco** *Junco hyemalis* Chester (Cheshire), from about 15th December 1997 to 15th February.

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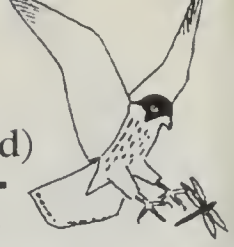

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British Birds

Volume 91 Number 3 March 1998

77 **Cetti's Warblers in the United Kingdom and the Channel Islands in 1996** *Simon Wotton, Dr David W. Gibbons, Michael Dilger and Philip V. Grice*

Announcement
89 BOU splits Chiffchaff

90 **Mystery photographs** 211 *Peter Lansdown*

93 **Dowitcher identification and ageing: a photographic review** *Dr R. J. Chandler*

Notes
107 Cattle Egrets nesting on cliffs *George Binns*
107 Hen Harrier breeding success on English grouse moors *Malcolm Stott*
109 Trapped Black-headed Gulls killed by Great Cormorant *Derek McAlone*

109 **Looking back**

Letters
110 Kittiwake versus Great Skua *Dr Ian D. Pennie*
110 Juvenile plumage of Northern Mockingbird *Dr Kenneth C. Parkes*
110 Abnormal Robin song *Chris Mead*
111 The Missing Rarities—not in the UAE! *Colin Richardson*
112 The report of the Rarities Committee *Dominic Mitchell*

Announcements
113 Bird photographs and digital images
113 Christmas puzzle 'Scilly twitch': the solution

Reviews
114 'A Field Guide to Warblers of North America' by Jon Dunn & Kimball Garrett *Stuart Winter*
114 'Where to Watch Birds in the London Area' by Dominic Mitchell *P. J. Oliver*

115 **News and comment** *Bob Scott and Wendy Dickson*

119 **Monthly marathon**

120 **Recent BBRC decisions** *M. J. Rogers*

120 **Recent reports** *Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan*

Line-drawings: 77 Cetti's Warbler (*John Hollyer*); 93 Long-billed Dowitcher in spring, with Little Stints (*Dan Powell*)

Front cover: Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* Littledown Park (*Andrew Tewson*): the original of this month's cover design, measuring 16.8 × 16.8 cm, is for sale in a postal auction (see page 66 for procedure).

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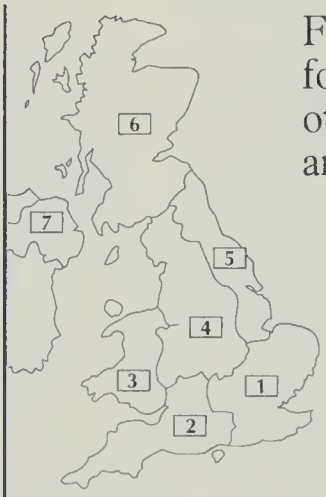

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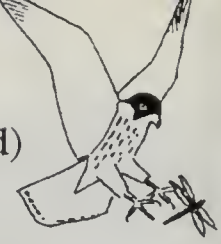

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RARITIES COMMITTEE NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Committee membership

ZEISS

Paul Harvey and Jimmy Steele were co-opted onto the BBRC in September 1997 to fill the vacancies created by the retirement of Rob Hume and the change in the voting status of the new Chairman, Dr Colin Bradshaw (*Brit. Birds* 90: 522). Nominations for membership of the Committee were invited in the birdwatching Press. No other nominations were received, so the two co-opted members are elected unopposed to serve from 1st April.

We are delighted to welcome Paul and Jimmy onto the Committee. They have already provided invaluable comments on those records that they have assessed as co-opted members. Paul, who now lives on Shetland, is well known to many observers from his time as Warden of Fair Isle Bird Observatory. He has an extensive knowledge of rare birds and is particularly experienced in the assessment of birds in the hand. Jimmy Steele has travelled extensively and has a particular interest in seabirds. He is known to many through his writing in various birding journals. Both have extensive experience, sound judgment and

▲ 31. THE BRITISH BIRDS RARITIES COMMITTEE: back row left to right, Michael J. Rogers (Hon. Secretary), Grahame Walbridge, R. A. Hume (then Chairman), Pete Ellis, Doug Page, Reg Thorpe, K. D. Shaw and Peter Clement; front row left to right, John Martin, Andy Stoddart, Dr Colin Bradshaw (current Chairman) and John McLoughlin, at Fountains, April 1997 (*J. T. R. Sharrock*)

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a proven ability in the field. In addition, they have the capacity both to analyse records and to deal with the paperwork involved in rarity assessment.

We shall miss Rob Hume, not only for his unflagging good humour, but also for his ability to balance conflicting opinions on the Committee. He is still providing considerable support to the new Chairman.

The BBRC is disappointed that it did not receive any outside nominations, since it is clearly preferable that there should be a democratic process of selection. Please think about nominations for next year. I am happy to discuss these at any time, and would welcome proposals prior to 30th November 1998.

Colin Bradshaw
9 Tynemouth Place, Tynemouth, Tyne & Wear NE30 4BJ

Records of Western Bonelli's Warbler in Britain, 1948-96

Subsequent to Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus orientalis* having been awarded specific status in 1997 (*Ibis* 139: 197-201; *Brit. Birds* 90: 70), all available evidence in the Rarities Committee's files relating to the 121 previously published British records (i.e. not including the 15 in Ireland) has now been studied in order to establish which can now be regarded as proven Western Bonelli's Warbler *P. bonelli*. The 51 accepted records are listed below in chronological sequence. The criteria employed were either the wing formula, in the case of trapped birds, or the characteristic callnote of *P. bonelli* having been heard from individuals observed in the field. All other previously published records now have to remain as indeterminate (either *bonelli* or *orientalis*), although it is appreciated that the vast majority probably relate to the former, especially those in spring. Indeed, a number of spring records were of singing birds, but any differences in song between the two species are at present insufficiently known.

The statement of policy relating to the publication of indeterminate records as if they referred to the Western species (*Brit. Birds* 90: 503) is now rescinded; records of Western, Eastern and Western/Eastern Bonelli's Warblers will henceforth be published as such.

M. J. Rogers
2 Churchtown Cottages, Towednack, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3AZ

Accepted records of Western Bonelli's Warbler:

Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, 31st August 1948, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 42: 215-216); Portland Bill, Dorset, 29th August 1955, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 48: 551); Bardsey, Caernarfonshire, 18th August to 5th September 1959, trapped; another, 10th September 1959, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 53: 276-278); Walberswick, Suffolk, 29th-30th April 1961, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 55: 579); Fair Isle, Shetland, 22nd September 1961, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 55: 579); Bardsey, 1st-2nd September 1962, trapped; another, 15th-16th September 1962, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 57: 279); Delamere Forest, Cheshire, 19th May to 9th June 1963 (*Brit. Birds* 57: 274); Dungeness, Kent, 2nd September 1963, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 57: 274); Portland Bill, 10th-20th August 1965, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 59: 295); St Agnes, Scilly, 4th-5th October 1965, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 59: 295); Sandwich Bay, Kent, 3rd-29th June 1967, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 61: 352); Hauxley, Northumberland, 4th November 1967, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 61: 352); Holme, Norfolk, 7th-13th August 1970 (*Brit. Birds* 64: 360); St Agnes, 4th-24th October 1971, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 65: 344); Beachy Head, East Sussex, 9th April 1972 (*Brit. Birds* 66: 349); Portland Bill, 9th September 1972 (*Brit. Birds* 66: 349); St Agnes, 12th-15th September 1973 (*Brit. Birds* 67: 333); Sumburgh, Shetland, 5th September 1974 (*Brit. Birds*

71: 522); St Agnes, 2nd September 1975 (*Brit. Birds* 69: 350); Lundy, Devon, 9th April 1976, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 70: 435); Portland Bill, 13th August to 3rd September 1976 (*Brit. Birds* 70: 435); Dungeness, 4th September 1976 (*Brit. Birds* 70: 435); Holkham, Norfolk, 5th September 1976 (*Brit. Birds* 70: 435); St Mary's, Scilly, 2nd-25th October 1976 (*Brit. Birds* 70: 435); Beachy Head, 15th September 1977, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 71: 522); St Mary's, 2nd-8th October 1977 (*Brit. Birds* 71: 522); Whalsay, Shetland, 21st-22nd September 1979, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 73: 525); South Walney, Cumbria, 7th May 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 578); Hengistbury Head, Dorset, 24th-25th May 1984 (*Brit. Birds* 78: 578); Bardsey, 20th August 1984, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 78: 578); Scnnen, Cornwall, 8th-22nd September 1985 (*Brit. Birds* 79: 575); Middle Soar, Devon, 23rd-26th August 1986 (*Brit. Birds* 80: 562); Beachy Head, 30th September 1986, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 80: 562); Holm, Orkney, 20th October to 15th November 1986, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 80: 562); Holme, 9th April 1988 (*Brit. Birds* 82: 552); Calf of Man, Isle of Man, 25th-26th September 1988, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 82: 552); Reculver, Kent, 2nd October 1988 (*Brit. Birds* 82: 552); Dungeness, 3rd September 1989, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 83: 485); Porthgwarra, Cornwall, 17th-30th September 1989 (*Brit. Birds* 83: 485); The Lizard, Cornwall, 13th September 1990 (*Brit. Birds* 86: 521); Porthgwarra, 25th-27th October 1990 (*Brit. Birds* 85: 545); Spurn, East Yorkshire, 24th October 1991, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 85: 545); Minnis Bay, Kent, 27th October to 9th November 1991 (*Brit. Birds* 86: 521); Filey, North Yorkshire, 19th September 1992, presumed same, 27th-28th (*Brit. Birds* 86: 521); Scarborough, North Yorkshire, 17th August 1993 (*Brit. Birds* 87: 559); North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 11th-13th May 1994 (*Brit. Birds* 88: 542); Sheringham, Norfolk, 3rd-6th September 1994, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 88: 542); Holy Island, Northumberland, 8th September 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 89: 520); Landguard, Suffolk, 2nd-25th October 1996, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 90: 513).

LOOKING BACK

Twenty-five years ago: 'INTRODUCTIONS AND ESCAPES The current project to re-establish the Great Bustard *Otis tarda* as a breeding species in Britain has focused attention once again on the merits of these and other introductions, just as did the abortive venture a few years ago to settle some young White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* on Fair Isle . . . Introductions in the name of sport are quite usual. Recently both Rock Partridges *Alectoris graeca* and Chukars *A. chukar* have been released in some numbers to see whether they might be easier to maintain than the indigenous Partridges *Perdix perdix* or the previously introduced Red-legged Partridges *A. rufa*.

'The Canada Goose [*Branta canadensis*] is . . . a perfect example of a species introduced to a new country where there is ample suitable habitat, and no natural controls to ensure that its numbers do not reach a level at which it becomes either an agricultural pest, a destroyer of habitat for other birds, or a direct competitor with an indigenous species . . . wildfowlers have clearly not learnt any lessons from the problems it has caused, as they persist in their encouragement of Barnacle *B. leucopsis*, Greylag *Anser anser*, Bean *A. fabalis* and White-fronted Geese *A. albifrons*. Resident flocks of these species [will] in a matter of years [result in] further complaints from farmers and little or no sport for the wildfowlers . . . Each year there are sightings of every conceivable kind of cage bird flying free in Britain, from ibises to cockatoos to tanagers—just some of the 700-800 species of bird regularly being imported into Britain. Each escape represents great carelessness by, as well as financial loss to, the owner, and a certain number of them cause great headaches to those who attempt to compile a list of the records of genuine vagrants to this country. So far, rather few escapes have established themselves as breeding species, for example the North American Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* and the Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*, but the risk is always present that some quite damaging species might do so. Certainly the controls on the import and subsequent care of cage birds are so minimal as to be of no practical use in reducing this risk.' (*Brit. Birds* 66: 133-134, April 1973)

Studies of West Palearctic birds

197. Tree Sparrow

J. Denis Summers-Smith

ABSTRACT The Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* and the House Sparrow *P. domesticus* are the only two members of the genus *Passer* that breed in Britain & Ireland. They are an interesting pair of congeners: both have extensive distributions in the Palearctic and Oriental Regions; both are commensals of Man in at least parts of their ranges; and both, despite some recent decreases in numbers in areas where they have long been established, are still expanding their ranges. A recent article in this series concentrated on the House Sparrow (Summers-Smith 1994); we now turn to the less familiar of the British pair, the Tree Sparrow.

It is an odd comment on human nature that most British birdwatchers, having ticked off the House Sparrow on 1st January for their annual list, scarcely give the species another look; yet the Tree Sparrow is generally regarded with great affection and faithfully recorded throughout the year. I do not think that this is solely because the Tree Sparrow tends to be regarded as something of a rarity in Britain; there is something appealing about it that makes it particularly attractive to those interested in birds.

The fact that the Tree Sparrow is a frequent subject in Oriental painting, going back as far as the twelfth century, may perhaps reflect something of this appeal. The simple brush strokes of the Chinese and Japanese styles of painting show an obvious familiarity with the bird and its behaviour. There may, however, be another side to the fascination in the East. The Tree

 [*Brit. Birds* 91: 124-138, April 1998] © British Birds Ltd 1998

Sparrow is widely eaten in China, where it is known as the 'hemp bird'. *'The hemp bird is rated as the most sensuous of birds; and so, eating its flesh is supposed to increase sexual potency'* (Eberhard 1986). Could it be that the birds' addiction to hemp *Cannabis* does something for the eater?

In contrast, the Tree Sparrow does not seem to have exercised the same attraction for painters in the West. It is, however, currently attracting much attention for a different reason: among declines in the numbers of birds in agricultural areas, the Tree Sparrow headed the list of ten of the most familiar farmland species with a significant fall in population in Britain in the last 25 years (*BTO News* 199, July-August 1995).

In this article, I shall concentrate on those aspects of the Tree Sparrow's life that have particularly fascinated me: its origin; recent changes in its distribution and numbers—decreases in numbers in much of Western Europe, contrasting with an expansion in range to the south in both the Far East and southwestern Europe; and the relationship between it and the House Sparrow.

Identification

The Tree Sparrow is unusual among sparrows in that the female has adopted 'male-type' plumage, with a patterned head and black bib, so that the sexes are indistinguishable in the field. Tree Sparrows are superficially like male House Sparrows, but can readily be recognised by their sleeker, neater appearance and a distinctive white semi-collar that is very obvious, even at a distance. The call is also quite distinctive: it is softer and higher-pitched than that of the House Sparrow. To me it sounds like a monosyllabic 'chirp' (though sonagrams show that it is, in fact, disyllabic) compared with the deeper, more obviously disyllabic 'chirrup' of its congener (Cramp & Perrins 1994).

Origins

The finches (Fringillidae), buntings (Emberizidae) and weavers (Ploceidae) have long been recognised as the major seed-eating families of birds. Linnaeus included the sparrows in the finches, but during the last century opinion has changed and most authorities now place them with the weavers (though not without some dissent), mainly on the grounds of the similarities in their nest-building activities. Anyone who has compared the nest-building skills of the weavers with the activities resulting in the domed, but otherwise untidy structures of the sparrows, will be excused any failure to see any close similarity. The current opinion, to which I subscribe, is that the sparrows are best considered as a separate family, Passeridae; included in this family are the snowfinches *Montifringilla* and the rock sparrows/petronias *Petronia*. The Passeridae differ from the other seed-eating passerines in their technique of dehusking seeds. They specialise particularly on the seeds of the larger grasses.

I have hypothesised that the genus *Passer* most probably had an Afrotropical origin, with a pioneering group spreading up the Rift Valley in the Pliocene,

reaching the Levant 500,000 years ago. These birds spread widely over the Palearctic and Oriental Regions, but were subsequently separated into nine isolated populations during the Pleistocene glaciations.

The next major factor in the history of the northern sparrows was the transition of Man from a hunter-gatherer to a sedentary agriculturist at the end of the Pleistocene about 10,000 years ago. The sparrows, preadapted to the seeds of the grasses that were the precursors of the cultivated cereals (wheat, barley, rice), were prime candidates to exploit the situation. Of the 20 species of sparrow currently extant (25 according to some taxonomists), no fewer than 60% (12 or 15 respectively) show some association with Man, nesting in buildings, and feeding on cereal crops, scraps around houses and feed put out for domestic animals. The two populations best placed for this were the birds living in the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East and the Yellow River Valley in present-day China, the centres where agriculture originated: the putative ancestors of the House Sparrow and Tree Sparrow respectively. Both of these became in fact 'house sparrows', anthropophiles or commensals of Man.

Range

Both species spread from their centres of origin with the advance of agriculture, and today have extensive and largely overlapping distributions over much of the Palearctic and Oriental Regions. The Tree Sparrow ranges from Japan and China to the western seaboard of Europe. In the north, the distribution is similar to that of the House Sparrow, reaching about 60°N, sometimes even farther; Brayton Holt informed me (*in litt.*) that Tree Sparrows visited his camp at 76°N in the Taymyr peninsula in July 1994, though these were presumably wandering rather than breeding birds. In the south, it is present throughout Indochina, Thailand and Burma, but farther west the southern limit does not go south of the Himalayas, the Afghan plateau and the Elburz Mountains of Iran. It is absent from the Indian peninsula, Iran south of the Elburz, and the Middle East, but it extends into Turkey and much of southern Europe, though it is somewhat sparsely distributed in Greece and the Iberian peninsula.

It is not known when the Tree Sparrow first arrived in Britain & Ireland—the earliest record that I can find is for Scotland (Sibbald 1684), oddly preceding that for England: a bird collected in Yorkshire in May 1720 (Nelson 1907). Of course, this may have been the result of difficulties in separating the species from the House Sparrow rather than evidence that it was absent, though the great English naturalists Ray and Willughby (Ray 1678) had already recognised it as a separate species in the seventeenth century. It is remarkable that, although the House Sparrow had probably been in England since Roman times, it was the Tree Sparrow that was present in the Western Isles and the adjoining west coast of Scotland from 1758 (St Kilda), though the House Sparrow began to colonise in the 1880s and the Tree Sparrow had disappeared by 1930. In Scotland, it is largely confined to the east coast and the lowlands (Baxter & Rintoul 1953; Thom 1986).

▲ 32. Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* with food for nestlings, Worcestershire, June 1983 (*M. C. Wilkes*)

The World range of the Tree Sparrow largely matches that of the House Sparrow, but with two major differences: the House Sparrow is missing from Japan, China, Indochina, Thailand and Malaysia, where the Tree Sparrow is a common bird of the built-up areas; whereas the Tree Sparrow does not occur in southern Asia from peninsular India to the Middle East and North Africa, where the House Sparrow is common. Why these large areas should be restricted to one of the two urban species, which coexist elsewhere in much of their ranges, poses an interesting question.

Range extensions

The second half of the nineteenth century saw a significant attempt by settlers from western Europe to introduce familiar birds from their original homelands. The House Sparrow was the most outstandingly successful of these; the Tree Sparrow, introduced in much smaller numbers, less so, though populations have become established in both Australia and North America. The species was first introduced to Melbourne, Australia, in 1863; the birds survived and after a slow start have recently shown a marked expansion and now occur over much of Victoria and southern New South Wales. In the USA, the colonisation has been less dramatic. Tree Sparrows were first brought to St Louis, Missouri, in 1870, before House Sparrows were present there. Following the arrival of the House Sparrow, the Tree Sparrows moved out into the farmland on the eastern side of the Mississippi and are now reasonably secure in the plains of the Mississippi and Illinois rivers in southern Illinois.

More interesting, however, are the recent extensions in southwest Europe and southeast Asia, where there is evidence that much of this has been a natural spread rather than a deliberate introduction by Man.

The Tree Sparrow was first reported from Corsica in 1906, but breeding was not recorded until 1965, though it had almost certainly begun before then. Today, it is present at lower altitudes over much of the island. In Sardinia, Tree Sparrows were reported breeding in Cagliari in 1898, but there was apparently little spread from there until the middle of the twentieth century. Since then, however, there has been a considerable expansion and today they are present in much of the coastal regions, breeding in towns and villages, taking over the role of the House Sparrow, which does not occur on the island (Summers-Smith 1992). Although Tree Sparrows have been known for a long time as autumn passage birds in Malta, breeding did not occur there until 1959, since when a small breeding population has become established (Sultana 1969; Sultana & Gauci 1982). Finally, in the Mediterranean region, there is now growing evidence of more than casual breeding in northwest Africa and, in 1966, I was able to establish the first breeding record for Crete: a nest at Malia on the northwest coast. I understand that there is a further possible breeding record for 1996, at Phaistos, 65 km away on the south coast (*Crete Bird Report 1996* in prep.). The most remarkable recent expansion has, however, been in the Canary Islands, where six to eight pairs were found breeding on Gran Canaria in 1989 in two separate localities (Trujillo *et al.* 1991). In 1993, I estimated that the population had increased to ten to 12 pairs, and in the same year there was a report of three birds in July on Tenerife (Lorenzo 1993).

The spread in southeast Asia has been more dramatic. Tree Sparrows were said to have been introduced to Java as early as 1800 and to Luzon in the Philippines in 1867. Since then, they have not only colonised all of the inhabited islands of the Philippines, Borneo and Indonesia as far east as Irian Jaya, but have also appeared on three island groups in Oceania: the Carolinas, Marianas and Marshall Islands. Although there is some suggestion that this may have begun in the latter half of the nineteenth century through deliberate introductions, the temporal pattern of occupation suggests that much of the recent expansion is a result of natural spread, albeit aided by Man providing the birds with the opportunity of hitching lifts on ships.

Migration

The Tree Sparrow is mainly sedentary in its breeding range throughout the year. Those from the most northerly Russian populations, however, withdraw south in winter (Dementiev & Gladkov 1954). Small numbers have been noted passing at the Swedish observation stations at Ottenby and Falsterbo in September-October (Edelstam 1972; Ulfstrand *et al.* 1974) and some passage has been noted over the North Sea in October-November, together with presumed passage migrants on the east coast of England (see Summers-Smith 1995 for details). There is more convincing evidence of movement through a number of high passes in the Alps and Jura Mountains in Switzerland, with

▲ 33. Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* at nest-hole in tree, France, April 1971 (*Richard T. Mills*)

ringing recoveries over 500 km to the south, though numbers are still small (Jenni & Schaffner 1984). Some late-autumn passage movement also occurs in the Mediterranean region, most particularly in Malta in October-November, with flocks of 50-80 recorded from the 1950s onwards (Gauci & Sultana 1971; Sultana & Gauci 1982); some of these birds overwinter, no doubt giving rise to the breeding population that was first noted in 1959, but what happens to the rest remains a mystery. This pattern of small numbers making short migrations to the south of the breeding area seems to hold over the remainder of the bird's range.

Habitat

In Britain, the Tree Sparrow is predominantly a bird of farmland, particularly mixed farmland with hedges and hedgerow trees, at times penetrating into light woodland. Outside the breeding season, the birds form flocks that roam over similar country, where they frequently join the feeding flocks of finches and buntings; they can also be found with House Sparrows in the surroundings of farm buildings and more rarely in suburban gardens on the outskirts of towns. In the adjacent continental areas of western Europe, it occupies a similar habitat, though there it is to be found breeding more often in villages and suburban areas. To the east, there is an increasing tendency for this association with Man, so that in central Siberia across to the Pacific coast it shares the urban environment with the House Sparrow. Farther south, in Afghanistan, the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union and southern Siberia north of the mountain range from the Hindu Kush to the Altai Mountains, where the House Sparrow is a summer visitor, the Tree Sparrow

becomes the exclusive urban sparrow, as it is in Thailand, Indochina, China and Japan, where the House Sparrow does not occur. On the southern slopes of the Himalayas and in Assam, Tree Sparrows and House Sparrows nest side-by-side in the built-up areas.

In southern Italy and Sardinia, where the House Sparrow is replaced by the Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis**, the Tree Sparrow once more is to be found predominantly in built-up areas. Even in the non-breeding season, it appears to be largely confined to this habitat.

Breeding

The nest site, selected by the male, appears to be the key to pair formation. Once formed, pairs are faithful for life, although, with an annual survival rate of only 35-40%, there are few long-standing pairs; in fact, Pinowski (1968) found in his Polish study area that first-years accounted for up to 75% of those rearing first broods. The prime nesting site is a hole; in Britain, where the species is mainly an inhabitant of farmland, this is usually a hole in a hedgerow tree. In many areas, hedgerow trees are not being replaced as they die, and Tree Sparrows are forced to adopt other sites, though lack of nesting sites does not appear to be a limiting factor on breeding; it could, however, be a crucial factor in the 'prairie farmland' of East Anglia, where potential sites have largely been removed. Many farmland pairs occupy abandoned nests of Magpies *Pica pica*; others use holes in buildings, particularly isolated buildings on farms that have been deserted by House Sparrows. Where they occur, old castle walls are a favoured site. In continental Europe, Tree Sparrows are more frequently to be found nesting in buildings, sometimes side-by-side with House Sparrows, on farms and the outskirts of villages.

Despite being a resident species, the Tree Sparrow is a comparatively late breeder in Britain, with few first clutches completed before the end of April, though the nest may be complete and ready for eggs some two or three weeks earlier. Successive clutches are laid at 30-40 day intervals, with about 75% of pairs laying two and 40% three clutches. Clutches normally contain four or five eggs. Both sexes take part in incubating the eggs and rearing the young. The incubation and fledging periods of 11-14 days and 15-16 days, respectively, are typical of small passerine hole breeders. The general breeding success rate is 62.5% and the annual productivity 6.2 young per pair (see Summers-Smith 1995 for details).

Ecology

Landbirds with extensive distributions pose problems for the writers of field guides, who have to summarise all aspects of the life of a bird in a few succinct sentences. The Tree Sparrow provides an excellent example of this, as its habitat changes markedly from west to east. This is also true of its behaviour. In Britain, it is an extremely secretive bird during the breeding season, yet in the Far East it is conspicuous in its urban habitat, though still retaining the

*I regard the Italian Sparrow as a subspecies of the Spanish Sparrow rather than of the House Sparrow.

wariness that is characteristic of all the sparrows. Those in Britain slip quietly off the nest at the approach of an observer, so that breeding can easily occur unnoticed. My own experience in the 1970s, at the peak of the Tree Sparrow population in England this century, serves to emphasise this point. I had never seen or heard a Tree Sparrow in my garden when, on a routine check of the nestboxes in May 1971, I found two boxes with complete clutches. I was able to confirm that these belonged to Tree Sparrows by careful observation from the house when I saw the birds unobtrusively change over for spells of incubation. In the East, however, I have noticed that the birds make no effort to conceal themselves.

The Tree Sparrow is basically a social species, nesting in loose colonies and living in flocks outside the breeding season, both for foraging and when roosting. In Britain, however, where the numbers are low, many of them nest in isolated pairs, even where there appear to be suitable nesting opportunities that would allow closer association. In my study area in northeast England, where there is a winter flock of 30-50, the nest sites are seldom closer than about 1 km, although in the spring, when the birds are active at the nests in the early mornings, they collect together later in the day into feeding flocks. Competition for nest sites does not appear to be acute. In Poland and other parts of continental Europe, the pairs return to their nest sites in the autumn with an outburst of sexual activity (Berck 1961-62; Pielowski & Pinowski 1962; Pinowski 1966); I have not observed this behaviour in my study area.

While Tree Sparrows are frequently to be seen in the fields with the feeding flocks of finches and buntings, they—like the House Sparrows that may also be present—have a different strategy to avoid predation. Both sparrow species forage close to good hedgerow cover where they can safely hide in the event of the arrival of a predator, whereas the finches and buntings readily move away from the field boundaries. The two sparrows, however, keep apart from each other, seeking different patches of cover. In these mixed feeding associations, the Tree Sparrows tend to remain silent (though they have their own specific alarm calls) relying on the alarm calls of the other species to give warning (Berck 1961-62).

Bursts of feeding activity last for about ten to 20 minutes, and then the birds gather together in thick cover, often indulging in what I call 'social singing'. This consists of a rhythmic sequence of calls that has a soft, conversational character. Both sexes take part and no doubt it serves to promote social cohesion when the birds are digesting the seeds they have eaten. Social singing occurs throughout the year, except during the breeding season.

Numbers

The recent upsurge in atlas studies and censuses covering whole countries has given excellent data on the density of the Tree Sparrow over much of Europe (table 1). These show a pattern of high density in mid-continental Europe (Germany, Netherlands and Belgium), contrasting with lower densities around the margins to the north and south.

Table 1. Estimated populations of Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* in eight European countries.

Country	Area (km^2)	Population (pairs)	Population density (birds/km^2)	Reference
Finland	337,127	5,000	0.03	Koskimies 1989
Sweden	449,199	15 million	6.6	Ulfstrand & Högstedt 1976
West Germany	248,698	2-3 million	20.1	Rheinwald 1982
Netherlands	34,965	½ - ¾ million	35.8	Teixeira 1979
Belgium	30,513	210,000	13.8	Devillers *et al.* 1988
France	551,671	½ -1 million	2.0	Yeatman 1976
Great Britain	227,519	285,000	2.5	Summers-Smith 1989
Ireland	79,515	6,500-7,500	0.2	Summers-Smith 1989

We must, however, be cautious about taking these numbers too literally. The census periods cover a span of at least 13 years. The Tree Sparrow has a reputation for fluctuations in numbers, though it has been suggested that this was to some extent a local phenomenon, resulting from the disappearance of established colonies and the formation of new colonies elsewhere. More reliable census methods, covering large areas, and based on a variety of monitoring techniques, have shown remarkable population changes in Britain & Ireland in the last 50 years. In 1957, the Tree Sparrow population began to grow and by 1964-65 had increased six-fold. Numbers then began to decline, initially slowly, but after 1980 at an increasing rate, so that by 1985 it was approaching the 1955 level (Summers-Smith 1989), and it reached that level by 1990 (fig. 1). There is as yet little evidence to suggest that this decline has come to an end. Analysis of the data shows a striking statistical correlation between the increase in Tree Sparrow numbers and the decrease in the population of the Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, following the introduction of organochlorine pesticides (1964-65). There is an equally

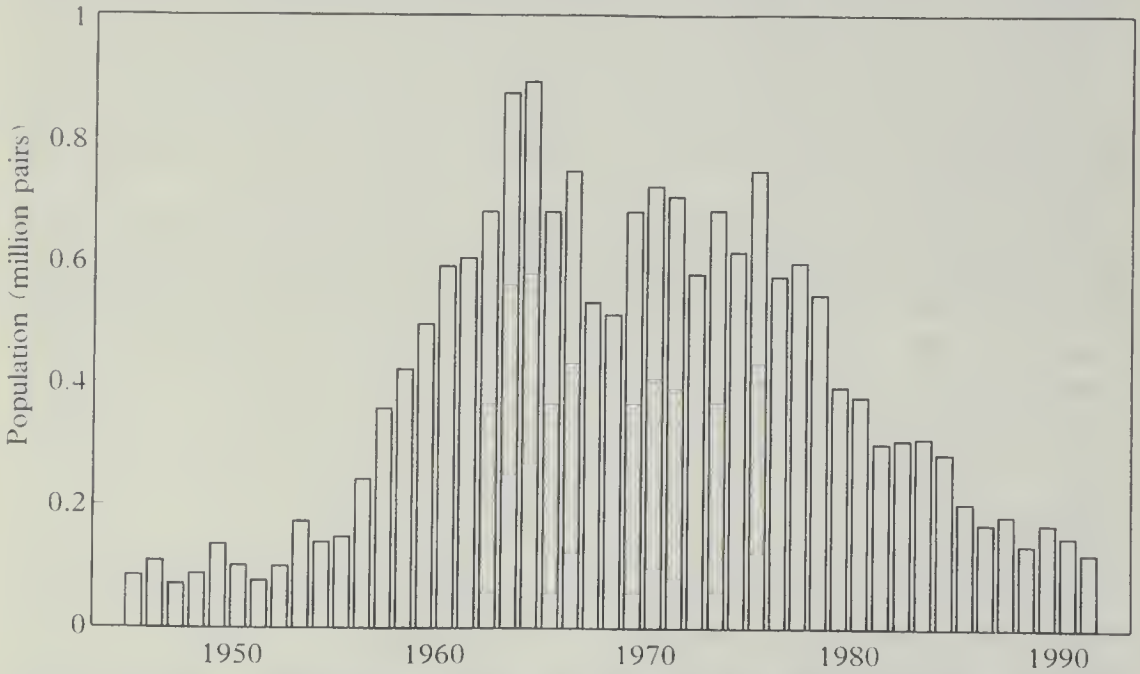
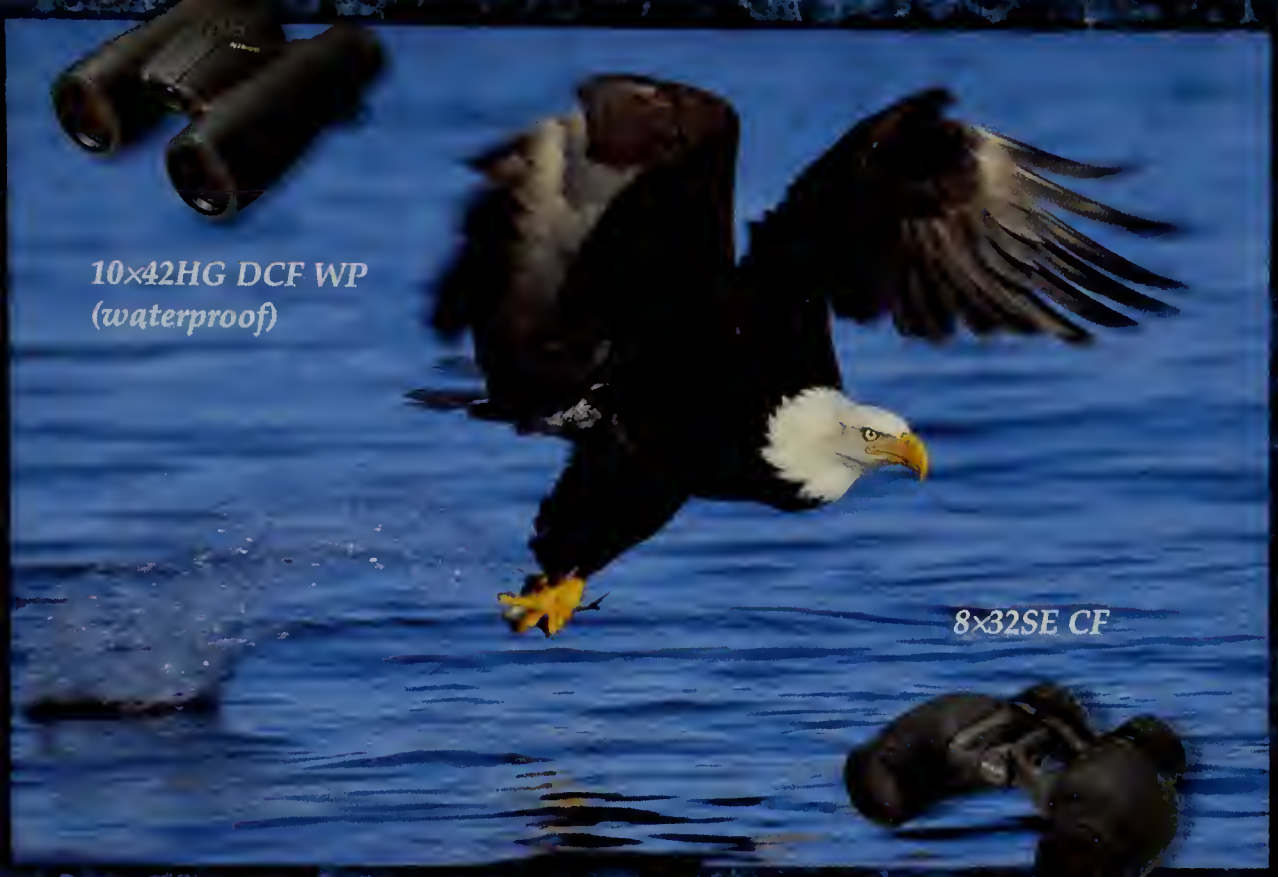


Fig. 1. Estimated population of Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* in Britain & Ireland from 1946 to 1992.



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striking correlation between the decline of the Tree Sparrow and the recovery of the Sparrowhawk, following the withdrawal of the organochlorine pesticides, reinforced this time by changes in agricultural practice: the change from spring to autumn sowing of cereals, reducing the availability of spilt grain and weed seeds during autumn and winter, and the change from hay-making to silage-production with the grass cropped before it has a chance to seed. While these are only statistical correlations, not proof of cause and effect, there is further circumstantial evidence that Sparrowhawk predation was a real factor from the fact that the Tree Sparrow decline began in the west of England coincidentally with the Sparrowhawk recovery there that preceded by about ten years the recovery in the east (Newton 1986).

Nowhere have the changes in numbers been more dramatic than in Ireland. The first record was in 1852, but there was little evidence of much expansion until the beginning of the twentieth century, when there was a significant build-up in the population, with breeding recorded in seven counties. Numbers began to decline in the 1930s, and by 1959 the species was extinct. Recolonisation took place, however, in the 1960s, and breeding has occurred since then in no fewer than 21 counties, with the species becoming more widespread than it was in the first colonisation.

It has been suggested that changes like this are characteristic of a species at the limits of its range, though it seems more likely to be part of a wider pattern in western Europe. While there has been no detailed, large-scale study of Tree Sparrow numbers in continental Europe over the same period, a number of local, short-term studies suggest that similar changes in numbers have occurred.

One has to be careful, however, not to read too much into the UK census data. There is a marked bias in the numbers of birdwatchers within the UK, with most results coming from the populous Southeast. While there may have been a significant reduction in Tree Sparrows in this area, personal observations suggest that any change has been much less marked in the Midlands and North. It is worth noting that the largest Tree Sparrow colony in Britain, at Beddington in Surrey, seems to be holding its own (Netherwood & Cook 1996).

Food

The food taken by Tree Sparrows has received extensive study, as the species has been perceived as a pest through its depredations on Man's cereal crops. There is no doubt that Tree Sparrows do eat grain, but the damage done so far as Man is concerned is a matter of contention. Are the seeds taken mainly waste and spillage? In any case, Tree Sparrows also feed on invertebrates, some of which are pests of plants. Is there a balance between the harmful insects taken and the loss of crops? This is a complex issue that has been put to the test at least once, on a massive scale. Chairman Mao decreed that the Tree Sparrow in China was a pest, estimating that one million Tree Sparrows would eat enough food to feed 20,000 people per year. A national campaign, involving three million citizens, was mounted for a three-day period in May 1959. It was claimed that many million Tree Sparrows were killed (for an entertaining account, see the article by the authoress Han Suyin, who was

▲▼ 34 & 35. **Tree Sparrows** *Passer montanus*: **above, Warwickshire, March 1988** (*Mike Lane*); **below, Warwickshire, November 1996** (*M. C. Wilkes*). Note glossy, all-black bill of adult in breeding season (above) compared with paler bill with yellowish base to upper as well as lower mandible (contra *BWP*) during rest of the year.

▼ 36. **Juvenile Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*, **Spain, August 1996** (*Roger Tidman*). Note blackish-horn bill with vestiges of nestling's yellowish gape, blackish flecking on dull-brown crown and pale, buff eye-stripe behind eye.

visiting Beijing at the time, Han 1959), though it did not have the desired effect. Mao's dabble into economic ornithology was rather simplistic, and, far from increasing rice yields, had the opposite effect, as allowance had not been made for the bird's positive role in controlling insect pests. The project was quickly forgotten and Tree Sparrow numbers soon recovered to their former level. A new threat has, however, arisen now that the Chinese have realised the potential of exporting Tree Sparrows as food. A consignment of no fewer than two million frozen Tree Sparrows was discovered by customs officials in Rotterdam in December 1993 in transit from China to Italy (Anon. 1993). Although there is nothing illegal in this trade, cropping at this rate must surely be more than the population can withstand.

A number of studies have shown that the Tree Sparrow specialises much more on the seeds of smaller herbs and wild grasses than on cultivated cereals (e.g. Hammer 1948), though there is no doubt that it can cause damage by taking food supplied for domestic animals. In addition to grasses, seeds of the following plants provide the most significant vegetable component of the diet: Knotgrass *Polygonom aviculare*, Fat-hen *Chenopodium album*, Common Chickweed *Stellaria media* and Shepherd's-purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris*. Against this, the adults take a lot of invertebrates, not only to rear their young, but also for themselves during the summer months; these include caterpillars, flies and beetles. Typical of these studies is one carried out in central Poland (Pinowski & Wójcik 1969), where there was a very high density of Tree Sparrows (over 500 birds/km^2). The authors came to the conclusion that Tree Sparrows caused no significant damage to the crops and even played a beneficial role through the destruction of harmful weed seeds and invertebrates.

Farming practice in western Europe, where there is almost complete elimination of annual weeds in cereal fields, may well be a contributory factor in the recent decline of the Tree Sparrow.

Relationship between Tree and House Sparrows

With two species that evolved with similar ecology and behaviour, competition was likely when they expanded their ranges and came into contact. Although there is some overlap in size, the Tree Sparrow is significantly smaller than the House Sparrow, as shown by the mean values of weight and total length for the nominate races: Tree Sparrow 24 g and 154.5 mm; House Sparrow 31 g and 166 mm. The House Sparrow would thus be expected to be dominant. While this is certainly the case in Britain, it is by no means universal. As we have already seen, to the east the Tree Sparrow becomes more conspicuous and, at the limits of the range of the House Sparrow, in Burma, the Tree Sparrow is the house bird, with the House Sparrow occupying rural areas. In Kazakhstan and Afghanistan, the situation is also completely reversed from that familiar in Western Europe: the Tree Sparrow is a resident, breeding in the towns and villages, whereas the House Sparrow is a summer visitor, confined to open, uninhabited country, nesting in holes in cliffs and under bridges.

It almost appears as if the species that was present first has retained the urban, synanthropic role. Suggestive of this is the recent expansion of

sparrows into the higher alpine valleys in Austria and Switzerland as they became suitable through the development of tourism (pers. obs.). These marginal areas have, however, been colonised by only one of the two species. Even earlier, Haller (1936) observed that the Tree Sparrow was well established as a breeding species in the more isolated farm buildings and in some villages not occupied by House Sparrows. Again, could it have been the one that got there first?

This is perhaps an oversimplification that applies only to marginal areas. The House Sparrow spread across the Urals to colonise northern Siberia only with the building of the trans-Siberian railway in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Tree Sparrow had been present in this area for some time, but already there was a gradual displacement of it from its dominant position as the urban species, taking place from the west.

Another striking difference is that, in the east, the Tree Sparrow lives up to its specific name *montanus* and breeds up to higher altitudes than does the House Sparrow, whereas the reverse is true in the Alps and the Pyrénées.

This leads to the fascinating question of why the Tree Sparrow is the odd one out of the nine Palearctic and Oriental sparrows. In eight of these species, the male has a characteristic pattern of white cheeks and a black bib with grey and/or chestnut on the crown, whereas the females tend to be a rather drab, nondescript brown. Uniquely, the sexes of the Tree Sparrow are indistinguishable in the field, with the female having adopted the 'male' plumage; further, the crown is chocolate-brown rather than the chestnut-red of the other sparrows. It seems likely that this must have evolved as a species-isolating mechanism to inhibit interbreeding with the House Sparrow, clearly important in these two sparrows so closely similar in their ecology. It is most probable that the development of the female Tree Sparrow's male-type plumage arose as a simple genetic change when the two species first came into contact some 5,000-8,000 years ago, possibly in Burma. It is, however, not completely effective in this. A study of hybridisation between Tree and House Sparrows uncovered 33 records (Cordero & Summers-Smith 1993); four years later, this total has increased to 63. This includes a case with the closely related Italian Sparrow, regarded by some as a race of the House Sparrow, in Italy (Costantini 1996) and also one with the Spanish Sparrow in Malta (Sultana & Gauci 1982).

Fig. 2 is a plot of reported instances of hybridisation in Europe for each decade from 1880-89 onwards. The increase beginning in the 1960s is dramatic, particularly for the 1990 'decade', which contains data for only seven years. No doubt some of this can be attributed to an increase in awareness and birdwatching skills, but there seems little doubt that there has been a genuine increase. Cordero and I attributed hybridisation to mate restriction—in the absence of a mate of the correct species, the bird would pair up with its congener rather than miss out on a chance to breed. The increase in records lends support to this hypothesis; since the 1960s, there have been dramatic changes in the numbers of both of the species, just the situation to cause increased difficulty in marginal areas for a bird to find a mate of its own species.

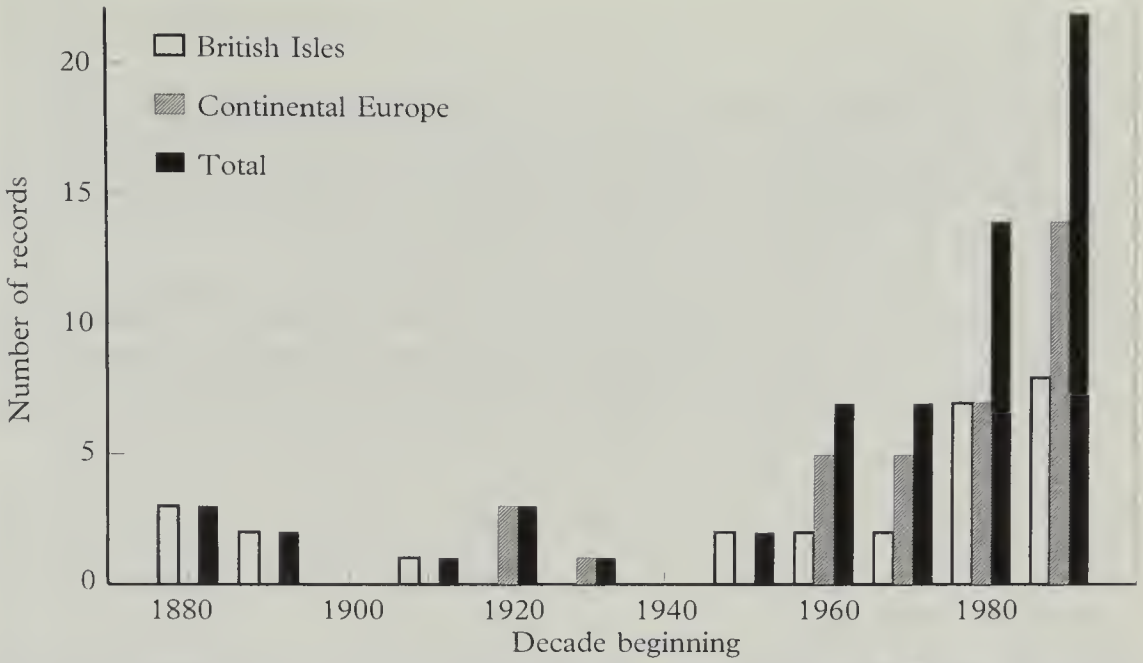

Fig. 2. Reported instances of hybridisation between Tree *Passer montanus* and House Sparrows *P. domesticus* in decades from 1880 onwards. (The 1990s is limited to 1990-96.)

A reflection

More than anything, this study highlights two things. First, the dynamic nature of bird populations. There is little doubt that change rather than stability is a dominating characteristic of all animal populations, though there is some suggestion that the speed of change has recently quickened through the activities of Man, leading to what has been described as another in the sequence of mass extinctions of life that have occurred through geological time. The Tree Sparrow seems to be an excellent indicator species that can be used to monitor the changes that are taking place.

Secondly, there is the difficulty of describing the nature of a widespread species in a few simple sentences. The behaviour and ecology of birds with extensive distributions can differ markedly in different parts of their range. But such change has to be gradual. If there is a sudden change, there must be a strong suspicion that we are dealing with a different species. Every statement has thus to be hedged around with the caveat 'in parts of its range'.

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NOTES

Alarm call of Common Coot in response to ground predator

On 30th August 1993, at Eavestone Lake, North Yorkshire, I observed a family of two adult and two juvenile Common Coots *Fulica atra* feeding at the edge of a small clump of reeds. Between 08.45 and 09.30 BST, a Stoat *Mustela erminea* made repeated attempts to entice the juveniles on to land by characteristic 'dancing' among the reeds. Each time the young were attracted towards the Stoat, one of the adult coots would emit a loud wailing call, often interspersed with short, deep rasping sounds. I recorded these calls (fig. 1);

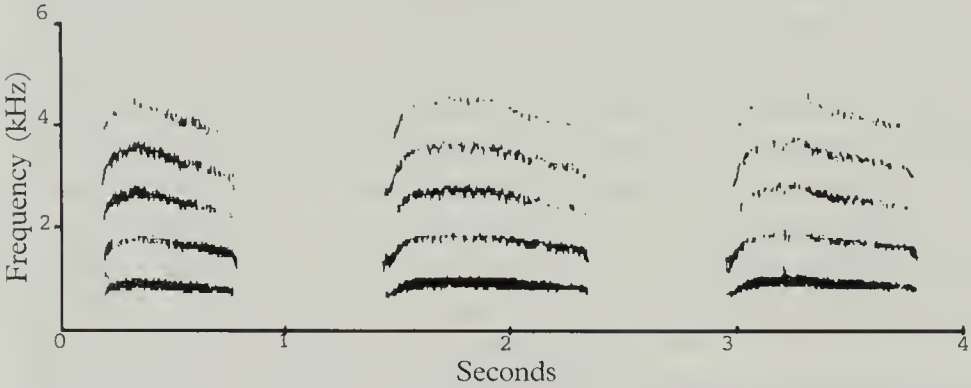

Fig. 1. Sonagram of alarm call of Common Coot *Fulica atra* in response to ground predator, North Yorkshire, August 1993 *(prepared by Richard Ranft, British Library of Wildlife Sound, National Sound Archive)*

they are similar to, but much louder than, the species' nocturnal flight call, and may also resemble the 'sobbing' or 'weeping' alarm of the female Common Coot in response to birds of prey (see *BWP* vol. 2). I could not identify the sex of the individual whose voice I recorded.

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Common Redshanks using trees as high-water roost

On 18th August 1993, at Isley Marsh on the River Taw, Devon, I saw 35 Common Redshanks *Tringa totanus* perched in two small dead trees surrounded by the waters of the high tide. Resting about 2 m above the water's surface, most with their bills tucked beneath their mantle feathers, they allowed an unusually close approach and were obviously settled to roost out the tide. The adjacent saltmarsh and estuary were water-covered, and other waders were roosting on or near grassy and stone embankments. At high tide on 1st September 1993, a single Common Redshank was perched in one of the trees.

This species frequently uses elevated perches when breeding, but roosting in trees away from breeding sites, while it may not be unusual, does not appear to be well documented. *BWP* (vol. 3) specifically mentions two instances, the circumstances in both cases suggesting that the waders had no alternative. The Common Redshanks in Devon, however, were using trees in preference to embankments and nearby grassy fields.

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Reaction of Common Greenshanks and Eurasian Curlew to Grey Squirrel

On 2nd September 1991, beside the Beaulieu estuary, Hampshire, a Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* appeared at the edge of a pool and made its way across the dried-up mud to the edge of a water channel, finally swimming across and climbing the grass bank opposite. At one point it passed close behind a Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, which immediately turned around and trotted after it through the water.

On 6th September 1991, at the same pool, a squirrel again appeared and moved towards the water channel. Before it could reach the water's edge, however, three Common Greenshanks *Tringa nebularia*, which were feeding in the water, intercepted the squirrel by immediately taking up a precise close formation about 0.5 m from each other, one on each side and the third behind. With necks lowered approximately to the horizontal and bills outstretched, they then escorted the squirrel at a trot back across the mud for some 35 m until it entered the fringing vegetation; any deviation from the most direct line of retreat was immediately countered by the wader formation. After the squirrel had cleared the mud, the three Common Greenshanks separated and walked the length of the vegetation, a distance of about 25 m, apparently to check that it had gone, during which time they called continuously in a subdued manner. They then flew back to the water channel and returned to feeding normally.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT This behaviour by the Common Greenshanks seems very unusual, and nothing similar is mentioned in *BWP* (vol. 3). Dr K. E. L. Simmons has queried, however, whether the waders were perhaps feeding communally and, in so doing, simply happened initially to move the squirrel on, but this seems unlikely since J. J. Garr (*in litt.*) has stated that the waders *flew* towards the squirrel.

Common Terns nesting on roofs in Suffolk

Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* breed in a wide variety of habitats, from shingle or sandy beaches to heath and even rocky shorelines. They also adapt readily to artificial sites, such as man-made islets on inland gravel-pits, rafts and low platforms over water. Since at least 1993, at Lowestoft, Suffolk, Common Terns have nested on the roof of the assembly shop of the former Brooke Marine shipbuilding yard. Although similar behaviour has been recorded in Finland (Hakala & Jokinen, 1971, *Ornis Fennica* 48: 135-137), where Common Terns nested on the sand-covered roof of a factory in Tampere, this may be the first reported instance of roof-nesting by this species in Britain & Ireland. Least Terns *S. antillarum* have used similar sites in North America (*BWP*, vol. 4).

The building used in Lowestoft, on a quay beside the saltwater inner harbour, is about 176 m long and 23 m wide, and aligned approximately east

to west. The roof, 15 m above ground level along the edges, is of corrugated asbestos sloping upwards at about 5° to a central ridge at 16 m; 24 rectangular ventilation hatches projecting about 30 cm at intervals along the ridge provide some shelter from the wind. Possible breeding on the roof was reported in 1992 (*Suffolk Bird Report*; see also editorial comment below), and on 3rd July 1993 I saw a pair of Common Terns feeding three half-grown chicks near one of the rooftop ventilators.

In 1994, I made more-detailed observations using a telescope at distances of 200-300 m (direct access to the roof is not possible): all the north-facing half of the roof could be examined in this way, but the terrain and other buildings restricted views of the south side to about 60%. A total of eight pairs of terns attempted to breed, seven on the north side and one on the south side. Nests were spaced over a distance of about 36 m in the middle section of the roof, all on the upper half of the slope; the main cluster of four nests had a minimum spacing of 5 m. When incubating and brooding, the adults generally preferred to sit across, rather than along, the axis of corrugation. The furrow of each corrugation is about 25 cm wide, thus forming an apparently comfortable substitute for a scrape (but, of course, lacking the sides). Lichens and other vegetation form a thin cushion in the troughs, and in places may allow compression into a shallow scrape.

In 1994, eggs were laid in late May and early June, hatching during 17th-27th June. Two nests failed at the chick stage, probably through predation. Of the six other clutches, three produced three chicks each and three each hatched two. At least nine chicks fledged in late July, giving a minimum productivity of 1.1 young per pair: at least as good as success rates quoted in the literature (e.g. *BWP*, vol. 4) for more-conventional colonies.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT We have also received a report on this same rooftop colony from Andrew Easton, who provided the following additional information. Both sides of the central section of the roof are heavily covered with mosses and lichens, with a few clumps of Biting Stonecrop *Sedum acre*, while much of the guttering is overgrown with grass. In June-July 1992, he saw up to at least eight adult Common Terns on the roof, some of which regularly brought in fish, but breeding could not be proved. In 1993, at least eight adults returned to the roof, and on 27th June the three recently hatched chicks were being brooded on the north-facing side against the upslope of a stonecrop plant (which may have been the original nest site, as it would have prevented eggs from rolling away); other adults were again carrying fish to the less viewable south side of the roof; the young were first seen to fly on 17th July. Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus*, domesticated Rock Doves *Columba livia* and Red-legged Partridges *Alectoris rufa* visiting the roof were tolerated, but all the adult terns very vigorously drove away from the site any aerial predators, such as Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* and numerous gulls *Larus*. The greatest danger is that the slanting corrugations channel rainwater through all potential nest sites, creating a much greater risk of chicks or eggs becoming chilled.

Fighting Magpies surrounded by others watching

A letter sent to me in October 1993 by Mr B. C. Doughty described how he and his wife came across six Magpies *Pica pica* standing silently and regularly spaced in a circle 2-3 m in diameter and all facing the centre, where two more Magpies were locked in combat. It sounds strangely human: bystanders gathering around a fight in curiosity, neither helping to separate the combatants nor offering encouragement. As with other birds, fights between Magpies sometimes result in a stalemate, where both individuals are equally motivated and equally unwilling to break off and retreat. I have read of two Magpies falling 10 m out of a tree, locked beak to beak, and continuing to struggle on the ground.

Why these two Magpies should have been fighting is impossible to decide. I can only assume that it was a dispute over territory, although most Magpies abandon their territories in autumn. The silent circle is even more of a puzzle. Among social species such as the Magpie, the sight of two individuals struggling on the ground attracts conspecifics, which may react as if one combatant is a predator attacking the other and may mob them, screaming abuse and even joining the attack. This was not so in this case: the onlooking Magpies were so mesmerised by the fight that they allowed the Doughtys to approach within a metre, clap their hands and shout at the birds. This recalls the 'charming' of a Stoat *Mustela erminea*, which turns somersaults until it has attracted a circle of fascinated birds, and then pounces.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT *BWP* (vol. 8) refers to fighting on territory and ceremonial gatherings. In view of a general scepticism concerning reports of the type of behaviour described above, however, Professor T. R. Birkhead's comments are of particular interest: 'I am not sure that this is far-fetched. I have seen Magpies fighting, grappling and locked together by their feet on a number of occasions and have been able to approach them very closely. On two occasions I actually touched them. It is also entirely consistent with my own experience that such fights hold a special fascination for other Magpies, and I can imagine that conspecifics looking on would allow themselves to be approached quite closely. Magpies fight for a number of reasons, but the most likely is over territory ownership. Some pairs defend territories throughout the year, so fights can also occur at any time of year. Magpies are intensely inquisitive about the activities of their neighbours—that is precisely why "ceremonial gatherings" occur—most birds are watching a territorial challenge. They have good reason to be interested: a change in territory ownership can trigger a domino-like effect on ownership of other territories.'

Tree Sparrows feeding on elm seeds over protracted period

Little is mentioned in the literature with regard to tree seeds in the diet of Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus*. Deckert (1968) wrote that this species often forages in the tops of trees for seeds of, for example, elm *Ulmus* and alder *Alnus*; and Grün (1975) stated that it eats seeds of Wych Elm *U. glabra* and

Downy Elm *U. laevis* only exceptionally, and takes seeds of Small-leaved Elm *U. minor* rather seldom and mostly only in small numbers.

Our garden in south Jutland, Denmark, contains some large Wych Elms. In summer 1993, these produced a record seed crop, and from mid May until the beginning of July a total of 17 Tree Sparrows, three pairs and their young, fed on the seeds in our pebbled courtyard for six to eight hours every day. We often observed them closely enough to see, even without binoculars, how they used the cutting edges of their bills to bite off the husks all the way around, before eating the small seeds inside. During this period, we never saw the sparrows feed on other items, nor try to take seeds still on the trees. The greatest percentage of animal food in the Tree Sparrow's diet is said to occur from May to July (Deckert 1968; Dementiev & Gladkov 1970; Grün 1975; Summers-Smith 1988), but arthropods were in very short supply in the area at the time following earlier application of pesticides on the surrounding corn fields.

A pair of Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs* often joined the sparrows, but never remained for long. We assumed that they, too, were eating elm seeds, as there was clearly no other food in the courtyard at that time, but we were unable to verify this.

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Summers-Smith, J. D. 1988. *The Sparrows*. Calton.

EDITORIAL COMMENT Dr Denis Summers-Smith has commented: 'The interest here is the apparent specialisation on one source of food that in most circumstances is not part of the normal diet. Although it is true that the greatest percentage of animal food is normally taken by Tree Sparrows from May to July, this does not mean that it is an essential or even an important part of the diet at that time of year, and does not justify the conclusion that shortage of animal food was responsible for the specialisation on elm seeds and was, by implication, a result of intensive pesticide use. A more likely reason is the exceptional production of seeds in the year in question.'

Bullfinches, Greenfinches and Dandelions

Dr Ian Newton (1972, *Finches*; *Brit. Birds* 86: 638-648) described how Bullfinches *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* attack the seed heads of Dandelions *Taraxacum officinale*. From observations in my garden at Stockport, Greater Manchester,

where these plants flourish under a rigorously applied regime of passive husbandry, I can add a little detail to Dr Newton's descriptions.

Bullfinches visiting my Dandelions will chew into the calyx of a closed flower head at the exact position of the seeds, in the same movement severing the seeds from the pappae (fluff); at no time have I witnessed them attempting to pull out seeds by tugging on the fluff, or attacking an opened Dandelion 'clock'. Greenfinches *Carduelis chloris,* which I have seen feasting on Dandelions, appear to pierce the side of the calyx to extract seeds with greater precision; again, 'clock' heads are avoided.

To extract seeds from those heads which are too high to reach even by stretching, Bullfinches move forwards along the ground, pushing the stem with their breast; this causes the stem to bend downwards, bringing the head to the ground, where the bird can hold it down with its foot on the stem. When faced with the same problem, Greenfinches will hover and alight on a Dandelion stem, bending it under their weight as they flutter, and will then shuffle sideways along the grounded stem to attack the head.

What I find remarkable in these finches' behaviour is the timing of the attacks (closed calyx, after flowering and before the 'clock'), and the fact that the finches cut into the calyx directly to the hidden seeds: both adaptations designed to minimise encumbrance by pappae.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Jürgen Nicolai, in 1956 (*Z. Tierpsychol.* 13: 93-132) and 1970 (*Elternbeziehung und Partnerwahl im Leben der Vögel*, p. 17), described the Bullfinch as normally alighting on the stem of a Dandelion, as described by Mr Hunter for the Greenfinch, but he once watched a male deliberately bite the stem at a convenient height so that the head sank to earth. Nicolai did not, however, mention Bullfinches pushing the stem with their breast to bend it down.

Use by birds of Rape fields in east Scotland

As Rape *Brassica napus* is a relatively recent field crop in Britain, it is of interest to know how birds adapt to such new habitats. Observations in England (*Brit. Birds* 83: 24-26) suggest widespread summer use of Rape as a habitat, but only by isolated individuals; the only exceptions, with 13 or more birds at a time, involved Corn Buntings *Miliaria calandra* and Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus.*

Our notes for Scotland for the years 1989-97, summarised below, are from the counties of Angus, Kincardine, Aberdeen, Banff and Ross. All Rape fields examined had no trees, bushes, ditches or streams that might influence the occurrence of birds. The following species were recorded in Rape during the breeding season:

SKY LARK *Alauda arvensis* Common breeder, up to 200 m from the edge; many reared two broods.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis* Some nesting; several reared two broods.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* One singer per 400 m of edge at some fields, and up to three per 400 m at one (fewer than in good riverside habitat); not seen in Rape fields on steep slopes and hilltops; many reared first broods in Rape, and several reared seconds.

COMMON WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis* Five singing from telephone wires above Rape; one pair reared a brood.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula* One sang for a few weeks from Rape.

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra* Three pairs reared young in Rape fields.

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs* Two sang for a few weeks from Rape.

REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus* Common breeder, even in big fields up to 400 m from the edge; sang from Rape tops.

CORN BUNTING *Miliaria calandra* Common breeder, most in outer 30 m, but a few up to 250 m from the edge; often sang from Rape tops; many first broods in Rape, and some seconds.

All species except Sky Lark and the two buntings were at or within 5 m of the edge, and most singing Sedge Warblers were out of sight, but almost at the edge. Reed and Corn Buntings and Sedge Warblers bred in Rape in all five counties, but the other species were seen only in lower Kincardine and lower Angus, where this crop has been abundant for more years.

Autumn-sown Rape provides early cover in spring, as it grows tall sooner than other crops (up to 55 cm by 21st March, 85 cm by 17th April and 1.8 m by early May). Spring-sown Rape gives little cover until mid June, but was used for some first and many second nests by Reed Buntings, Sky Larks and Meadow Pipits. Flowering Rape attracted abundant St Mark's flies (Bibionidae), and many Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica*, House Martins *Delichon urbica* and Common Swifts *Apus apus* fed on these above the flower tops. In August and early September, spring-sown Rape that was still green held a few passing Common Whitethroats, Sedge Warblers, Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus* and Northern Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe* for some days.

After midsummer, many species fed on unharvested Rape seeds, including flocks of Wood Pigeons *Columba palumbus*, Rooks *Corvus frugilegus*, Jackdaws *C. monedula* and Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, as well as finches, sparrows and buntings with fledglings and in flocks. From August to April-May, all these fed often on Rape seeds in cut fields, especially where cut swathes lay unharvested, as well as on seeds spilt on roads. Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers *Emberiza citrinella* and, to a lesser extent, Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla* were frequent in Rape stubble, and Linnets *Carduelis cannabina*, Goldfinches *C. carduelis*, Greenfinches *C. chloris* and Chaffinches very frequent. In one case in 1993/94, 1.5 ha of uncut spring Rape beside a broadleaved wood attracted about 800 of the last four species from October to early May.

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LETTERS

Dippers' Twitch

'News and comment' (*Brit. Birds* 90: 581) revealed birders' troubles with Back-packers' Syndrome. The cause—being overloaded with technical equipment—is peculiar to our hobby and is, therefore, a new condition.

If we are to be welcomed into the group of physical ailments such as Guitarists' Nipple, Cellists' Scrotum and Hang-gliders' Bottom—all genuine medical syndromes—we need to find a suitable name for the condition.

I first thought of Numbskulls' Neuralgia, but it does not affect only twitchers (sorry!). Birdline Blues does not seem descriptive enough, and Twitchers' Tingles seems a bit twee. Dippers' Intermittent Paralysis Syndrome provides a nice acronym: having the DIPS is a good parallel with divers having the bends.

The syndrome, is, however, basically about losing. If you cannot carry your tripod, telescope, camera and telephotos, recording equipment, pager, CB radio, lunch, whisky and waterproofs without getting ill, you are going to miss out. How about Dippers' Twitch?

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The Cirl Bunting in Britain

Dr Andy Evans' paper 'Cirl Buntings in Britain' (*Brit. Birds* 90: 267-282) raises once more the vexed question of the origin of the species in Britain. I remain uneasy about the notion that the Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus* colonised the 'English Riviera' only towards the end of the eighteenth century, as I noted in 1983 (*Brit. Birds* 76: 461-462). It is not impossible, of course, with the recent spread of Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* and Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* as recent comparable examples. It is dangerous to assume, however, that such a colonisation affected the Cirl Bunting and this should not become a part of bird-lore without further evidence to support it. In quoting from Yarrell's 4th edition of his *A History of British Birds* (1874), Evans presented a picture of too gradual a spread of the species in Britain. Yarrell's 2nd edition (1843) already gave records 'near Doncaster in 1837' and about this time from York and Edinburgh.

That the Cirl colonised Britain not long before Montagu's discovery of it in 1800 near Kingsbridge, Devon, seems to rest on the facts that Latham (*General Synopsis of Birds*, vol. 2, 1783) said that the species was found only in the warmer parts of France and Italy, and that the Revd Gilbert White did not mention it in *The Natural History of Selborne* (1788). Such negative evidence is not sufficient to rule out an alternative explanation. Alfred Newton (*A Dictionary of Birds*, 1893-96) wrote that John Latham 'did not possess the inborn faculty for picking out the characters wherein one species differs from another'. Nor should one expect Gilbert White to have been familiar with all species that may have existed in remote parts of southern Britain if not in his immediate area.

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Newton was, perhaps, too severe on Latham, given the state of ornithological knowledge in the late eighteenth century and the ambitious concept of his mammoth work. It was Latham, after all, who added the Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* to the British List in 1773. Other records soon appeared; Montagu recorded it in Constantine, Cornwall, in September 1796. Should one conclude from this that the Dartford Warbler also first colonised Britain not long before 1773 and quickly expanded its range? The Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* was added to the British List in 1829 by John Gould, but passage migrants and wintering birds had reached Britain before that. Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Cornwall, Truro, by Jonathan Couch of Polperro, show that they did. Descriptions in his 'Journals of Natural History' indicate that specimens were taken to him in December 1822 and on 19th November 1824.

What Montagu said of the Cirl, he might equally have said of the Dartford Warbler: 'It is remarkable that so common a bird as the Cirl-Bunting seems to be in the West of England, should have so long escaped the notice of British naturalists; but in all probability this has been occasioned by their locality.' It is surely no coincidence that the Large Blue butterfly *Maculinea arion* was discovered in Cornwall, 'in unfrequented places' south of Bude, only as recently as July 1891; this area became a Mecca for butterfly-collectors only with the opening of the railway to Camelford in 1893 and to Bude in 1898.

The dearth of records in the late eighteenth century merely highlights the scarcity of naturalists, the sheer remoteness of many rural areas so easily accessible today, only the naked eye and the gun for identification, and books of questionable accuracy affordable only by the few. You see only what you look for. Once Montagu had identified the Cirl Bunting as British, is it any wonder that others were soon more widely found by 'the few'? Who is to say that Gilbert White and his contemporaries did not simply assume that the call of the Cirl was just a variant call of the Yellowhammer *E. citrinella,* with which Montagu had seen it associate? Only intensive observations by Gilbert White gave him 'no doubt but there are three species of willow-wrens' (letter, 18th April 1768): Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, Willow Warbler *P. trochilus* and Wood Warbler *P. sibilatrix*. Others failed to do so years later; William Marwick in the 1802 edition of White's *Selborne* wrote 'I have used my utmost endeavours to discover his three birds, but hitherto without success.' White does not appear to have given much attention to the buntings. All six references in his 'Journals' are to the Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*, rare in his parish, while in his *Selborne* he says little about Yellowhammers other than that they breed 'very late' and consequently 'protract their song', an observation which applies equally to the Cirl Bunting.

The Cirl Bunting is not a noted British migrant; records only 'may suggest that there are occasional immigrants', as Evans pointed out (p. 268). Couch, in his manuscript 'Cornish Birds' (1829), described the Cirl as 'common, & not migrant'. I suggest that the Cirl Bunting had been in Britain for a long if unspecified time, and that, like the Dartford Warbler, its distribution fluctuated with climatic change. The eighteenth century was not the best time for a bird most at home in the Mediterranean hinterland to colonise Britain

for the first time. Gordon Manley (*Climate and the British Scene*, 1952, p. 24) noted severe winter months during 1740-48, 1760-68, 1776-89, 1795-1803, 1808-20, 1826-30 and so on, with (p. 246) wetter years in the 1760s and early 1770s, and cold summers in 1782, 1784 and 1799. Is it not possible that the Cirl Bunting's range contracted to the 'English Riviera' long before 1800, just as it has done in the second half of the twentieth century for different reasons? Montagu himself described the winter of 1800 in Devon as 'severe', which 'did not force them to seek a warmer climate, but on the contrary, they continued gregarious with other small birds, searching their food amongst the ploughed lands.' This, to my mind, has the hallmark of a long-established resident which managed to maintain a small foothold in Britain, to attain its maximum extent only in the climatic amelioration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, aided by more intensive farming (organic, of course) to feed Britain's expanding population, which at the same time left the Cirl with plenty of winter stubble in which to forage in winter.

The truth may never be known, but the alternative to a late-eighteenth-century colonisation deserves a hearing.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Dr A. D. Evans has replied as follows: 'Roger Penhallurick is quite right to suggest that the lack of records of Cirl Buntings in Britain prior to 1800 does not necessarily mean that the species colonised the country only about that time; indeed, his hypothesis (that Cirl Buntings were a long-established resident whose fortunes had fluctuated with long-term weather patterns) is plausible. Unfortunately, we are unlikely ever to be able to discriminate between the two alternatives. There is little doubt, however, that the population did undergo a spectacular expansion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and an equally spectacular decline from the 1960s.

'The importance of the RSPB project (which took place before the declines in many common farmland birds had been realised) lies in the identification of the reasons for the population collapse. This was almost certainly caused by changes in farming practice which reduced the availability of food to both breeding and wintering Cirl Buntings, thereby reducing both adult survival and productivity. This finding contrasted with the prevailing opinion that the decline was due to climate change (although the reduction in winter food availability may have rendered the birds far more vulnerable to extreme weather, especially prolonged snow cover).

'Penhallurick draws a comparison between Cirl Buntings and Dartford Warblers; the latter were reduced almost to extinction by the winter of 1961/62. Happily, they have recovered fairly rapidly to 1,600-1,900 pairs in 1994 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 1-22). Cirl Buntings showed no such recovery until the appearance of set-aside in 1988 and the introduction of farm-management agreements under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in the 1990s.

'Whatever the origins of the species in Britain, it is clear that its future is dependent upon measures being taken to mitigate the huge changes in land use that have occurred as a result of agricultural intensification.'

Redhead in Nottinghamshire: new to Britain and Ireland

M. C. Dennis

ABSTRACT A male Redhead *Aythya americana* with Common Pochards *A. ferina* at Bleasby, Nottinghamshire, during 8th-27th March 1997 was the first record of this North American duck in Britain & Ireland.

A chance conversation with Simon Roberts on Friday 8th March 1997 resulted in my searching a former gravel-pit at Bleasby, Nottinghamshire, for (reported) Bearded Tits *Panurus biarmicus*.

I arrived at around 15.45 GMT and set off to seek the area most likely to hold Bearded Tits, walking the 40-ha complex anti-clockwise. As the footpath skirted the first small (3-4 ha) pool on the circuit, Common Pochards *Aythya ferina* began to emerge from their feeding area under the overhanging vegetation. As they swam away, I casually raised my binoculars and immediately saw a larger, slightly darker but otherwise Common Pochard-like bird which I identified as a drake Redhead *A. americana*. I am very familiar with Common Pochard, as my job as Senior Warden at Colwick Country Park brings me into contact with the species throughout the winter, so I knew that the darker individual was something different; I have seen public collections which held both Canvasback *A. valisineria* and Redhead, so I knew which features to look for.

I quickly returned to the car with mixed emotions: completely sure of my identification, but obviously dubious of the bird's origins. I settled down to take notes and was able to view the bird through 10×42 binoculars at a range of about 100 m. I then compiled as thorough a description as I could, using Common Pochard for direct comparison. After ten minutes or so, I telephoned other local observers, but was able to contact only two: John Hopper, the County Recorder, and Bernie Ellis, who arrived after what seemed to me an interminable wait. We then all enjoyed good views as the Redhead fed, preened and courted a female Common Pochard within the small flock. During this period of observation, both legs were noted to be without rings, and full perfect wings were seen; further notes were then taken.

Description (from notes taken on 8th & 9th March)

Obviously bigger and sitting higher in the water than Common Pochard. All subsequent comments relate to a direct comparison with Common Pochard.

Same basic plumage and coloration. Bill longish, with fine black line at base (not easy to see). Lower mandible straight, blackish underside. Upper mandible decurved to half way, but not so much as on Common Pochard, more proportioned. A white band on bill was cut square and not angled, less clear-cut towards the 'face' and grading into the general blue/grey colour of the bill; black 'dipped in ink' tip and nail; slight hook at tip. Nostrils large, blackish inside. Leg colour not properly noted; no rings on legs. Eye colour yellow/orange, but more yellowy; pupil black.

Head shape recalled that of Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*, especially in silhouette, having steep forehead and full-looking back of head, quite different from that of Common Pochard. Breast black, fuller than that of Common Pochard, and seemingly ending squarer on sides, not curved as on Common Pochard. Belly whitish. Tail greyish. Rump and undertail blackish, which seemed to be slightly more extensive than on Common Pochard, also slightly different shape. Mantle vermiculated darker grey. Flanks warmer than the steely cold grey of Common Pochard. Wing colour and pattern not clearly seen, but had a full, perfect set of wings.

Behaviour identical to that of Common Pochard. When the birds first moved out from the bank, it swam away in typical Common Pochard manner: unhurried, but purposeful. It fed with them in a similar manner, making short dives and coming up with a bill full of weed. Call 'weeooo', similar to that of Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*, but less whistly.

Unfortunately, the initial site was private and the local Parish Council Chairperson flatly refused en-bloc access, agreeing only to 'local' viewing. Next morning, about 20 'locals' were on site at dawn. Fortunately, the bird was flushed by a dog-walker and flew to the nearby Gibsmere pool, which allowed public viewing. News was broadcast via our own Nottinghamshire Birdnews service and the national lines, and Bleasby braced itself for the invasion.

I was away for the weekend, but I understand that local parking evolved, and Bleasby traders had an excellent day. I was also away when the bird slipped away with the wintering Common Pochards, right on cue, being last seen on 27th March. During its 20-day stay, it provided numerous photo opportunities (*Brit. Birds* 90: plate 164; 91: plates 37-40).

The debate which ensued naturally centred on the bird's origins. All I can say is that ducks are amongst the most mobile of species and, if the species migrates any distance, it is a possible addition to any list.

M. C. Dennis, 4 Douglas Crescent, Carlton, Nottingham NG4 1AN

EDITORIAL COMMENT Dr Colin Bradshaw, Chairman of the BBRC, has commented: 'The identification of this bird was not a problem and was accepted on first circulation. This was not particularly surprising, as male Redhead is an obvious species, we had an excellent description and photographs, and it was seen by many observers including several members of the Committee.

▲▼ 37-40. Male Redhead *Aythya americana*, Nottinghamshire, March 1996 (above, *M. McDonnell*; below, *Iain H. Leach*)

'Male Redheads are similar to Common Pochards, but are slightly larger, with a very steep forehead and more rounded crown reminiscent of a Red-crested Pochard. They have an all-blue bill with a thick black tip, and yellow eyes, and are noticeably darker on the back than Common Pochards, which have a black tip and base to the bill with a broad blue-grey band between and red or red-orange eyes. Females are rather more difficult to identify and could possibly be mistaken for female Ring-necked Ducks *A. collaris*. Compared with Common Pochards, they are slightly larger, have a characteristic rounded head shape, are usually darker and more uniform, and have less-extensive but more obviously contrasting pale areas on the side of the head. The facial pattern is quite distinct and reminiscent of female Ring-necked Duck, with a very dark crown, a pale eye-ring extending backwards a short way as an eye-stripe, and a large pale area at the base of the bill separated from the eye-ring by a dark vertical bar joining the cap to a dark patch below the eye. The rest of the cheeks are paler than the cap, but darker than the pale areas. Female Redhead is, however, distinctly larger and lacks the characteristic peak at the back of the head so characteristic of Ring-necked Duck. In addition, its bill is usually either all-black or blue with a black tip (sometimes with a slightly paler area just proximal to the black) and it does not show the white subterminal band separating the black tip from the blue base of the bill as on Ring-necked Duck.

'Male hybrid Common Pochard×Tufted Duck can closely resemble Redhead, as discussed by Vinicombe (in Harris *et al.* 1989) and Kemp (1991). Hybrids often have orange eyes, a different head-shape from Pochard and darker upperparts. The lower flanks, however, are paler and can show a distinct demarcation line in a similar pattern to that of Tufted Duck, and there is also a whitish wing-bar. In addition, hybrids usually have a darker-based bill with black tip and an irregular pale subterminal band, lacking the clarity and contrast of the pure blue-grey bill, white subterminal band and "ink-dipped" tip of male Redhead.

'There is now a well-established pattern of Nearctic duck records in late winter/early spring and this record fits in well with that. The bird was also found in the middle of a spell when numerous other Nearctic birds were reported, with American Coot *Fulica americana*, Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*, several Lesser Scaups *A. affinis* and over 20 Common Teals *Anas crecca* of the "green-winged" race *carolinensis*. The predilection of rare North American ducks for turning up in the middle of England is fascinating, but there can be little doubt that at least some and perhaps all of them are genuinely wild birds.

'It is also interesting to speculate on why it is that the first few individuals of any Nearctic duck species occurring here are males. This pattern has certainly established itself for Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup, and both Redhead and Canvasback may well be following suit. Similar patterns have been observed in the Atlantic states of the USA (Paul Lehman *in litt.*) and Newfoundland (Bruce Mactavish *in litt.*). Is it just that males are more easy to identify, or are they more frequent in the early stages of vagrancy? There is some suggestion (Keith Vinicombe verbally) that "trail-blazing" male ducks predate expansion of range so that the first few individuals of any new species are likely to be males. As the species becomes more set in its new vagrancy

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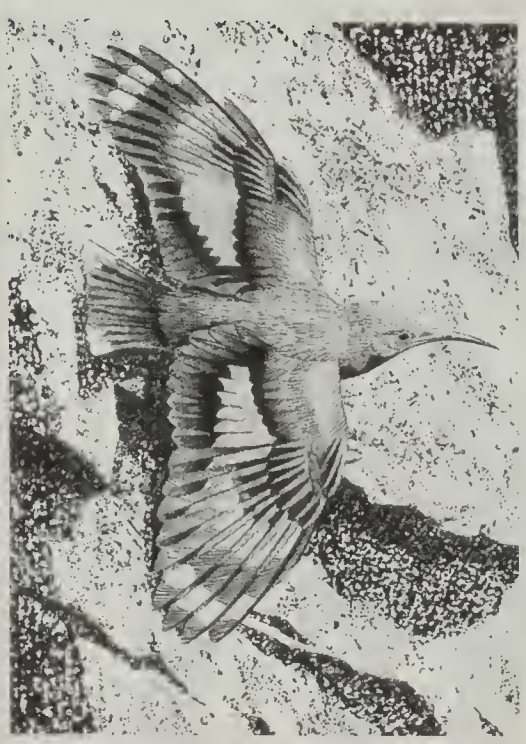

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pattern, females begin to occur. The other possibility is that people do not start looking for females until a few males have occurred and allow the species to "break through the credibility barrier". If the former is the case, it is likely that the records of Nearctic *Aythya* ducks in the last 20 years reflect a genuine change of status rather than their having been overlooked previously.'

Professor David T. Parkin, Chairman of the BOURC, has commented: 'Once the possibility of a hybrid had been eliminated, there was no dispute over the identification of this bird, and (as so often has been the case recently) the major question was the bird's origin: a wild vagrant or an escape from captivity? My own first rare duck was a male Red-crested Pochard on the River Wear when I was an undergraduate at Durham University, back in the 1960s. It took bread from my hand, and I have been sceptical about wildfowl ever since.

'There are huge numbers of wildfowl in captivity in western Europe, and Redheads are rather cheap, suggesting a combination of easy availability with lack of desirability. The British captive populations are difficult to survey: many keepers are very reluctant to report the numbers in their collections. The captive-breeding register for 1991-94 showed, however, that Redhead (72) is about as common as Lesser Scaup (94), but much less abundant than Canvasback (158). The totals given in parentheses are of value only as comparable figures, since so few collections are included. A relatively recent survey from the Netherlands (van der Laar *et al.* 1994) reported on the number of birds held by members of the avicultural organisation 'Aviornis'. About one-third of their members responded to a survey in 1991, and (among many others) possessed 2,379 Hooded Mergansers *Lophodytes cucullatus*, 1,553 Baikal Teals *Anas formosa*, and 615 White-headed *Oxyura leucocephala*, 1,697 Marbled *Marmaronetta angustirostris* and 2,126 Ferruginous Ducks *Aythya nyroca*. Unfortunately, Redhead and Canvasback were not included in the survey. Since 1995, Dutch law requires that most species of captive wildfowl should be ringed, and many are pinioned. This is not, however, the case elsewhere in Europe, where captive wildfowl are fully winged and unringed, and known to escape. So, there is a problem with vagrant wildfowl, and every record has to be looked at carefully.

'Recent reports and records show that the occurrence patterns of North American ducks are complicated. Some cross the Atlantic in autumn in fast-moving depressions, and arrive in Britain like waders and passerines. They are predominantly (but by no means exclusively) in west-facing areas such as southwest England and Ireland. A second group includes birds that arrive in Britain during the winter, perhaps as refugees from hard weather. Their patterns of occurrence are similar to those of the autumn arrivals.

'The Redhead, however, arrived in spring, and a clear pattern at this season is now beginning to emerge. This does not involve just ducks: American Coot and Pied-billed Grebes *Podilymbus podiceps* have both been recorded at this time of year; these are almost unknown in collections, and are surely genuine wild birds. Keith Vinicombe pointed out (*in litt.*) that, in January 1997, the American Steve Fossett attempted to circumnavigate the globe in a hot-air balloon. He left St Louis in Missouri and crossed the Atlantic in two days,

arriving in southern Iberia/Morocco. Admittedly, Fossett used the jet-streams to aid his passage, but if he could cross so fast with no power, how long would it take a duck? Many of the species that are found in Britain in spring typically spend the winter along the Atlantic seaboard from Maryland and the Carolinas south to Georgia and even Florida—which is at a similar latitude to Morocco. Any bird that flies out to sea in an easterly direction from this area to avoid the cold will arrive in northwest Africa or Iberia. Six Ring-necked Ducks were reported from Tenerife in 1996/97; the previous year, there were three Ring-necked Ducks and two Lesser Scaups—together! Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*, Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* and Tricolored Heron *Hydranassa tricolor*, Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*, Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* and Bonaparte's Gull *L. philadelphia* have all been recorded from this area in recent winters, and there is a ringing recovery of an American Ring-necked Duck from Spain.

'Clearly, there is a pattern for American ducks to arrive in northwest Africa and Iberia in mid-winter. In spring, some of these birds may return across the Atlantic, but others will respond to the increasing photoperiod by beginning to migrate northwards. Some will join up with similar species, such as Common Pochards and Tufted Ducks *Aythya fuligula*—species that move through Britain towards breeding areas in Scandinavia and west Russia, favouring the eastern side of the country. It is not unreasonable that known spring migration routes, such as the Severn and Trent Valleys, and major staging lakes, such as Abberton and Chew Valley Reservoirs, should provide spring records of these vagrant species.

'Good rainfall in the prairies and a decade of duck conservation in North America resulted in record populations of Redhead (and Canvasback) in 1995. BOURC members commented that it is surely not entirely coincidental that, within a year of these extreme numbers, both species had been reported in Britain.

'In summary, the bird was unringed and its behaviour was compatible with that of a wild bird. It is not especially common in captivity in western Europe. It occurred at a time of record population levels in North America. Its date and location are consistent with mid-winter vagrancy at lower latitudes followed by northward migration alongside a common European species. The record was accepted after a single circulation, and Redhead was admitted to Category A of the British List (*Ibis*, in press).'

Since this occurrence, a record of another (or possibly the same) adult male, at Rutland Water, Leicestershire, during 4th-24th February 1997, has been accepted by the BBRC (*Brit. Birds* 91: 76).

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OBITUARY

Colin Tubbs (1937-1997)

▲ 41. Colin Tubbs at Denny Wood, New Forest, Hampshire, April 1986 (*Jenni Tubbs*)

With Colin Tubbs' death from cancer on 17th October 1997, the wildlife conservation movement and ornithology have lost one of their most effective campaigners. Born in Portsmouth, Colin left Portsmouth Grammar School aged 16, taking a number of short-term jobs, including two years as a forest worker on a Hampshire estate, followed by National Service in the Dorset Regiment (1955-57). Joining The Nature Conservancy in 1960 as New Forest summer warden, he continued with the Conservancy and its successors, subsequently becoming senior Hampshire and Isle of Wight officer based in Lyndhurst, until his early retirement in 1993.

The ornithological and conservation seeds had been sown at an early age; he was writing about the birds of Langstone and Portsmouth Harbours at 13, becoming a founder member of what became known as The Portsmouth Group and initiating one of the first long series of wildfowl and wader counts in the UK—a forerunner of the Wetland Birds Survey. He began studying Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo*, Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio* and Dartford Warblers *Sylvia undata* during camping expeditions to the New Forest; the Forest, on which he was to become an acknowledged authority, was his first love.

Early fieldwork set the pattern for his lifelong ornithological interests in wildfowl—especially Brent Geese *Branta bernicla*—waders and raptors, to which many of his publications are devoted. Without formal academic training, Colin's activities spanned the amateur/professional divide as if it was non-existent. His professional role was characterised by his selfless and successful advocacy, at numerous public enquiries, on behalf of Hampshire and Isle of Wight wildlife sites. Most were won by the simple expedient of meticulous preparation so that he knew more about the conservation case than did the opposition.

Colin wrote four books: *The New Forest: an ecological history* (1968), *The Buzzard* (1974), *The New Forest* (1986) and *The Solent* (in course of publication). Additionally, he produced, occasionally co-authored by his wife Jenni, at least 86 academic papers and comparable publications, as well as many articles in popular journals, magazines and newspapers. Birds of estuaries and raptors featured in a wide range of ornithological studies; papers in *British Birds* contained much of his Dartford Warbler work, including national breeding censuses, and studies of New Forest buzzard ecology.

After retirement, besides continuing to devote himself to writing and despite ill-health, Colin's horizons expanded. He was partly instrumental in setting up a Europe-wide Forum concerned with pastoral agriculture and nature conservation; he was a Director and Treasurer of the associated limited company at the time of his death. He saw pastoralism as the key to retention of wildlife sites such as the New Forest.

We extend our deepest sympathy to Jenni, his family and his many friends.
Norman Pratt and Eddie Wiseman

MONTHLY MARATHON

The headless, seaweed-frequenting wheatear *Oenanthe* was named as Northern *O. oenanthe* (79%), Isabelline *O. isabellina* (17%) and Desert *O. deserti* (4%). T he majority choice was correct, this Northern Wheatear having been photographed in Scilly in October 1982 by Mrs M. A. Harding. The leaders got it right. Stephen Foster, David McAdams and Richard Patient are all now on 17 correct answers, Dave Hunter on 15, Jorgen Munck Pedersen and G. Rotzoll both on 14 and Carlos Gutiérrez Expósito, Jakob Sunesen and Peter Sunesen all on 13. If the preening bird in March (plate 30) does not sort out a winner of the SUNBIRD holiday in Africa, America or Asia, perhaps plate 42 (below) will do so.

▲ **42. 'Monthly marathon'.** Photo no. 140. Twentieth stage in ninth 'Marathon'. Identify the species. *Read the rules* (*Brit. Birds* 90: 66), then send in your answer *on a postcard* to Monthly Marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ, to arrive by 15th May 1998.

SHORT REVIEWS

Oiseaux de la Réunion. By Nicolas Barré, Armand Barau & Christian Jouanin. (Les Éditions du Pacifique, Paris, 1996. 208 pages. ISBN 2-87868-027-8. FF145 + FF20 p&p) A revised, updated and improved edition of a book first published in 1982. It provides a historical background to the ornithology of the island, including accounts of the extinct birds, noting that early descriptions of the White Dodo or Solitaire refer probably to an extinct ibis, *Threskiornis solitarius*, recently described from sub-fossil bones. Most of the book provides accounts of the resident and the most frequent visiting birds. The illustrations are generally accurate; there are few errors, the most glaring being the illustration of a 'juvenile Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*' which looks more like an adult Eleonora's Falcon *F. eleonorae*. Useful to anyone visiting Réunion or any of the other Mascarene Islands. *CARL G. JONES*

Field Guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Great Britain and Ireland. By Steve Brooks. Illustrated by Richard Lewington. (British Wildlife Publishing, Rotherwick, 1997. 160 pages. ISBN 0-953-13990-5. Paperback £18.95) Recently, many birdwatchers have been focusing their binoculars on dragonflies during quieter midsummer days, and this excellent new guide is sure to encourage even more to do so. With superb illustrations by Richard Lewington (which include lateral views of every species for the first time, as well as the more familiar dorsal ones), and a first-rate text by Steve Brooks, including very informative introductory sections, this becomes *the* guide to keep in the car or to carry in the field for anyone interested in these fascinating insects. *DAVID FISHER*

Where to Watch Birds in Bulgaria. By Petar Iankov. (Pensoft, Sofia, 1996. 179 pages; 39 line-drawings; 39 site maps. ISBN 954-642-011-5. Paperback £10.00) Bulgaria, with its marvellously varied landscape, has to be one of the most exciting European countries for birdwatching. Lying on a major migration route, one can view thousands upon thousands of Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis* or watch endangered Dalmatian Pelicans *Pelecanus crispus* and also see Wallcreepers *Tichodroma muraria* 'easily'. This essential, BirdLife International-endorsed guide has all the information you need to do so. All key sites are covered in detail, with highly accurate maps designed to lead you straight to the birds. *NIK BORROW*

The Hummingbirds of North America. By Paul A. Johnsgard. (Christopher Helm, London, 1997. 2nd edn. 278 pages. ISBN 0-7136-3919-9. £35.00) This book covers 47 species occurring in North America south to mid Mexico (only about 15% of the World's species). Aspects of biology and plumage are well covered in the thorough text, and a key with some line-drawings is useful. I was disappointed by the 24 colour plates, 20 tending towards the pretty, and the key to the plates is not user-friendly. This is probably the best work currently available, but we must hope that a definitive account of the World's hummers is being considered. *DAVID HOLMAN*

North American Owls. By Paul A. Johnsgard. (Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington DC, 1997. 2nd edn. 295 pages. ISBN 1-56098-724-3. Paperback £19.50) In many ways, this is an excellent book, and well worth acquiring as an addition to the bookshelves of any bird-lover.

Part one, on the comparative biology of owls, includes evolution and classification of the 19 species of North American owls, their ecology and distribution, physiology, behaviour and biology.

A short chapter documents myths and legends, of which there are probably more surrounding owls than any other group of birds. The bulk of the book is quite rightly devoted to the natural history of the 19 species, with excellent distribution maps and an abundance of good sketches. Water-colours by Louis Agassiz Fuertes and a selection of photographs complement the text. *DERICK SCOTT*

The Bird Collectors. By Barbara Mearns & Richard Mearns. (Academic Press, London, 1997. 472 pages. ISBN 0-12-487440-1. £34.95) Those who know the Mearnses' *Biographies for Birdwatchers* (1988) and *Audubon to Xantus* (1992) will eagerly

acquire this companion volume detailing the exploits of an extraordinary assortment of scientists, soldiers, clergymen and others who acquired bird specimens with a wide variety of motives. The exploits and the sheer scale of the various expeditions and collections are mind boggling. Almost every page contains facts of which today's birdwatchers are likely to be ignorant. Did you know, for instance, that the Millerbird formerly occurred on Laysan (one of the Hawaiian islands), that it was an *Acrocephalus* warbler, and that its extinction (and that of several other endemics) was caused by the liberation of excess numbers of pet Rabbits, Guinea-pigs and Belgian Hares?

This is not only a useful reference book, it is also a good read. *JTRS*

Birds for all Seasons: chronicles from the Thames Valley. By James Monk. Illustrated by Robert Gillmor. (Pica Press, Sussex, 1997. 67 pages. ISBN 1-875403-64-X. £12.95) This delightful small book by one of our ablest senior ornithologists arrived too late to go into every birdwatcher's Christmas stocking. It has a dozen monthly surveys of bird life around the author's home at Goring and a score of essays on individual species, including the Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, the latest bird denizen of the Chilterns.

Richard Fitter

The Birdwatcher's Yearbook and Diary 1998. Edited by John E. Pemberton. (Buckingham Press, Maids Moreton, 1997. 320 pages. ISBN 0-9514965-9-X. Paperback £12.50) It has been said many times before: 'Invaluable'. That is exactly what *The Yearbook* is for the staff of the *BB* Editorial Office. If there is a single publication which can provide answers to queries regarding clubs, societies, reserves and organisations (both national and international), with names, addresses and telephone numbers, *The Yearbook* has to be the one. The addition of interesting articles on a wide range of topics and a smattering of book reviews gives us something to dip into for fun during our lunch break as well as to use during our working hours.

Sheila D. Cobban

Atlas de las Aves Nidificantes de la Provincia de Burgos. By Jacinto Román Sancho, Fernando Román Sancho, Luis Miguel, Ansola Aristondo, Carlos Palma Barcenilla & Rafael Ventosa Fernández. (Círculo, Burgos, 1996. 322 pages. ISBN 84-7009-485-8. No price quoted) With over 50 scenic photographs in colour, the reader can gain a good impression of the bird habitats of this area of 362 10-km squares in the region of Burgos (inland, south of Santander), Spain. The area was surveyed during the five years 1987-91, and the maps use the standard three sizes of dot signifying possible, probable or confirmed breeding. The text is wholly in Spanish. This attractive volume is enhanced by the inclusion of scattered line-drawings, colour paintings and colour photographs of some of the typical birds. *JTRS*

Birds of Charnwood. By Michael Webster. (Kairos Press, Leicester, 1997. 196 pages. ISBN 1-871344-12-3. Paperback £9.95) This is the high-definition (1-km-square) breeding-bird atlas of Charnwood Forest (just south of Loughborough, Leicestershire), carried out by Ed Derby, Bas Forgham, Peter Gamble, Michael Webster and Steve Woodward. This survey was carried out during April to July in 1993-94 (with some infilling in 1995), totalling 862 hours, an average of 6½ hours in each of the 132 1-km squares. A total of 92 species was proved breeding, an average of 30 in each square. The bulk of this book is made up of maps, text and often a line-drawing, with one page devoted to each species. The texts contain many personal observations, quotations from the literature and snippets of poems, as well as mere factual comment. To give a flavour of the text: 'The Garden Warbler is the elf of our woodlands, a creature difficult to see, neither handsome nor colourful, but with such a beguilingly rhythmic warbling song as to draw you unwittingly into the woodlands in search of the source of the music, a search which will often end fruitlessly, leaving only shadows behind.' There are lots of points of interest in the text, even if you have no intention of ever visiting Charnwood Forest. Do you, for instance, know whose 'finger marks' are said to have created the barring on the crown of a Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*?

Additional observers were involved in special night surveys, but this is essentially the work of five dedicated birdwatchers, and demonstrates how much can be achieved by a small team. *JTRS*

MYSTERY PHOTOGRAPHS

▲ 43. Mystery photograph 212A.

▲ 44. Mystery photograph 212B.

212 Mixed flocks of Dalmatian Pelicans *Pelecanus crispus* and White Pelicans *P. onocrotalus* do occur, but the two are most often seen separately, and a typical view is of a small party of one or the other species in flight overhead. Mystery photograph A, taken by Tim Loseby in India in January 1982, shows a Dalmatian Pelican, while mystery photograph B, taken by Leif Schak-Nielsen in Kenya in June 1977, shows an adult White Pelican.

In flight, though Dalmatian Pelican may be distinguished from White Pelican by its larger size, this is readily discernible only in direct comparison and, even then, the use of this character is complicated by the noticeable size differences between the sexes of both species. The seemingly untidy plumage of adult Dalmatian Pelican is slightly greyish-white, while the smaller species has almost pure white, relatively neat-looking adult plumage. The throat-sac of adult Dalmatian Pelican is dull, pale yellow or greyish-yellow, becoming bright yellow, orange or even red during breeding, while that of adult White Pelican is yellow, turning bright yellow or orange in the breeding season. The larger pelican's legs and feet are lead-grey throughout the year, while the flesh-coloured or pink legs and feet of the smaller pelican become brighter in spring.

From below, even at close range, when the differences in size, plumage tone, throat-sac colour and leg and foot colour, as well as some of the features of the head, may be appreciated, underwing-pattern is unquestionably the most useful character for separating the adults of Europe's two breeding

pelicans. The underwing of adult Dalmatian Pelican is grey, darkest on the outermost six primaries and across the tips of the inner primaries and secondaries and palest across the greater coverts in a long, diffuse central wing-stripe. The underwing of adult White Pelican has largely black primaries and secondaries and is otherwise white, giving a clean-cut, striking appearance.

The upperwing of adult Dalmatian Pelican is greyish-white with largely dark grey primaries and primary coverts and grey-and-white striped secondaries. The upperwing of adult White Pelican is similar, being white with largely black primaries and primary coverts and black-and-white striped secondaries, the predominantly black outermost gradually giving way to the mainly white innermost, but, as with the underwing, it presents a more contrasting look.

Most notably when the two pelicans are at rest, good views of their heads reveal a number of differences. In the breeding season, Dalmatian Pelican develops a curly crest on its hindcrown and hindneck, a much-reduced version of which is retained throughout the year. This spring acquisition is quite unlike the long, drooping hindcrown-feathers of White Pelican, which are worn only in the breeding season. The larger pelican possesses a broad band of forehead feathering which ends bluntly in a concave line at the bill, while the smaller pelican has a narrow strip of forehead feathering which meets the base of its upper mandible in a point. The off-white, bare facial skin of Dalmatian Pelican is restricted to a ring around each of its very pale greyish-yellow eyes and a band of corresponding width between the eye and the bill; the facial skin becomes purple during breeding and the eyes look pale at all times. The pinkish-yellow, bare facial skin of White Pelican occupies extensive, angular-shaped areas which encompass the deep red eyes and are of considerable width where they meet the bill; the facial skin turns pink or orange in the breeding season and the eyes appear black at a distance throughout the year. The head profile, the shape of the forehead feathering and facial skin and the eye-colour combine to give the two pelicans very different facial appearances.

Peter Lansdown
197 Springwood, Llanedeyrn, Cardiff, Glamorgan CF2 6UG

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NEWS AND COMMENT

Compiled by Wendy Dickson and Bob Scott
Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'

Conservation in the Spanish steppes

A campaign to conserve one of the finest surviving areas of steppe in Spain, La Serena, nearly 100-thousand ha of pasture and cereal in the Extremadura region of southwest Spain, has been initiated by 'GRUS', the local environmental organisation in La Serena, named after the area's most important wintering species, the Common Crane *Grus grus*. The campaign, supported by the Spanish Ornithological Society (SEO), has the aims of raising public awareness and encouraging conservation and research within La Serena, and is placing pressure on the regional and national authorities to declare a nature reserve for the region.

In addition to the wintering cranes, the area is important for nesting Great *Otis tarda* and Little Bustards *Tetrax tetrax*, Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, Pin-tailed *Pterocles alchata* and Black-bellied Sandgrouse *P. orientalis* and Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*. All these populations are declining in the face of intensification of agriculture and loss of habitat through afforestation. Each spring, the pastures are sprayed with an insecticide to kill locusts, a major food item for most of these birds.

Readers can help in two ways. First, by supporting GRUS with a donation (or by joining as a member for £5): Asociacion por la Naturaleza Extremeña, c/ Doctor Diaz de Villar, 3-06420 Castuera (Badajoz), Spain; and, secondly, by writing to His Excellency the Minister for the Environment, Urbanism and Tourism in Extremadura Region, C/Cárdenas, 11-06800 Merida (Badajoz), Spain, drawing his attention to the conservation importance of La Serena and asking him to support any plans to declare the area a Nature Reserve.

Farmers, keepers and birds

We regularly encourage readers to take a look at the Game Conservancy Trust (GCT) *Annual Review* in the belief that birders will find much to interest them. We took this one stage farther recently, when we attended an Open Day at the Loddington Estate where the GCT runs a research project in conjunction with its partner, the Allerton Research and Educational Trust.

Now, we are not farmers, nor are we gamekeepers, and as such we had little in common with the majority of those who attended. The work we were shown, however, was fascinating. Whatever your views may be on the shooting of Pheasants *Phasianus colchicus*—and much of the work was devoted to improving the farm for game species—the results were clearly impressive. It is some while since we have walked around a commercial/profitable farm and watched flocks of Greenfinches *Carduelis chloris* and Linnets *C. cannabina* feeding on the 'weed' seeds, whilst Willow Tits *Parus montanus* called from the hedges and parties of Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* flew overhead. Brown Hares *Lepus capensis* dashed away across the meadows and Grey Partridges *Perdix perdix* called from the field margins. If only all farms were like this.

The Allerton Research and Educational Trust's stated aims include balancing profitable farming with game conservation and the benefits to other wildlife; researching the relationship between farming and conservation; and educating farmers, other conservationists and the wider public with the results of this research. Full details from the Trust at Loddington House, Loddington, Leicestershire LE7 9XE.

BPY 1997, 1998 and 1999

▲ 45. **BIRD PHOTOGRAPH OF THE YEAR 1997.** Left to right: Mike Boon (Sponsor, *Canon (UK) Ltd*), Dr Jens Eriksen (Winner), Mrs Dorothy Hosking (Guest Presenter), David Norton (Under-25 winner) and Bob Glover (3rd), London, July 1997 (*Peter Wilkinson*)

Last year's was the final competition within the three-year sponsorship deal with Canon (UK) Ltd, celebrated in grand style at the Forte Posthouse Regent's Park Hotel in London (plate 45).

As already announced (*Brit. Birds* 91: 66), the 1998 competition is being supported by the sponsors of Bird Illustrator of the Year, *Pica Press* and *T. & A. D. Poyser*.

We are now seeking major sponsorship for BPY for 1999 onwards. Any offers or suggestions will be greatly welcomed . . .

Hides for the living

Traditionally, hides have been named in memory of someone, usually a birder, who had close associations with the site concerned. The new hides at the RSPB Dungeness reserve are named after the living. For, after the 'Firth Hide', in memory of a local naturalist (traditional); the 'Christmas Dell Hide', named after its position; and 'Hide One' (boring!), two new hides, 'Makepeace Hide' and 'Scott Hide' are named after past wardens, both very much alive and one a joint compiler of this column. There are still Axell and Pickup to go if the Dungeness reserve is to have a full set.

On a personal note, I feel particularly pleased and honoured that the 'Scott Hide' overlooks the very first excavation on the reserve that I supervised, back in 1967. Visitors who now watch the rare migrants or breeding seabirds may like to know that the very first bird recorded on the site was a Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* that dropped in for a drink after the first drag-line exposed the first water. (*BS*)

Bardsey news

Steven Stansfield has been appointed as Warden of Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory.

The Observatory is running a ringing course during 16th-23rd May 1998. Anyone interested should contact Steven immediately, at BBFO, Ynys Enlli, off Aberdaron, via Pwllheli, Gwynedd, Wales LL53 8DE.

Barbour drops out

We have just been informed by J. Barbour & Sons Ltd that it can no longer be one of the ten co-sponsors of Young Ornithologists of the Year. We regret, therefore, that the three Young Ornithologists of the Year 1998 will (contra *Brit. Birds* 91: 73) not each be receiving a *Barbour* jacket as part of their prize. We thank J. Barbour & Sons Ltd for its support over the past four years.

Pesticides profile rises

Regular readers of this column will know that we are not slow to keep plugging away at the message regarding pesticides in the countryside and the effects upon birds and other wildlife. We are not blind to the fact that action will depend upon conclusive scientific results, but those wheels do seem to turn remarkably slowly at times. The latest contribution to the debate goes some way to taking us forward, but still seems remarkably cautious in its conclusions. The report, *The Indirect Effects of Pesticides on Birds*, has been produced by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, edited by English Nature and the RSPB. Significant contributions came from Oxford University, BirdLife International, Butterfly Conservation, the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology and Plantlife. We seem to have taken a long while to reach some of the report's conclusions: 'numbers of seed-eating birds are higher in winter on fields with more weeds' and 'there is evidence to suggest that the declines in bird food are, in part, attributable to the effects of pesticides.'

Coming to our attention in recent weeks are three examples where chemicals seem to be involved. Birds were reported dying after feeding in rape fields that had been sprayed with an insecticide; chicks of Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* in the Trent Valley were becoming deformed, apparently as a result of reduced calcium take-up, maybe the result of chemicals in the food supply; and recently a request from France to a British pest-control company seeking 14,000 gallons (3,080 litres) of a banned chemical to be used as a bird deterrent in French orchards. There still seems to be a lack of an agency or organisation prepared to investigate, analyse and collate the snippets of information that keep coming to people's attention. Yes, we need a sound scientific base, but someone, somewhere has to find it. Copies of the report are available from JNCC Communications, Monkstone House, City Road, Peterborough PE1 1JY.

Legal-status changes in Eastern Europe

This is a good-news/bad-news story. Romania has recently introduced a new hunting law which has added several species, previously unprotected and hunted, onto the protected list. Amongst those species now protected are Lesser White-fronted *Anser erythropus* and Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis*, Great Bustard *Otis tarda* and White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*.

In contrast, new laws in Estonia have added species to the game list. These include Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*, four species of gull *Larus*, Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* and Raven *Corvus corax*. Barnacle Goose hunting will start in autumn 1997 and is stated to be in response to increasing numbers causing damage to crops. Until recently, the Estonian government has paid the equivalent of over 37,000 DM (that it can ill afford) in annual compensation to farmers. Somehow, adding Barnacle Goose to the game list seems more acceptable than adding Fieldfare.

French hunters carry on regardless

John Cantelo has drawn to our attention the Boulogne edition of *La Voix du Nord* of 22nd July 1997 which reported that 200 anti-hunters had arrived at the Platier d'Oye nature reserve in Oye-Plage, the nearest Continental reserve to the UK, to denounce the owners of seven blinds within the reserve who were hunting with impunity. Waiting to receive them were as many hunters, come to defend not only their huts but also their passion and tradition. The anti-hunters, exasperated by the laxity of the authorities to uphold the law, arrived armed with shovels to fill in the contentious blinds, but for the hunters this was 'unacceptable provocation' and serious confrontation was only narrowly avoided. For more than ten years, plans for mediation have foundered, with the hunters considering themselves victims of a foolish idea, the anti-hunters contending that this is an important corridor for migrating birds, and the authorities apparently condoning hunting.

Resolving this *impasse* will not be easy.

RECENT BBRC DECISIONS

ZEISS

This monthly listing of the most-recent decisions by the British Birds Rarities Committee is not intended to be comprehensive or in any way to replace the annual 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain'. The records listed are mostly those of the rarest species, or those of special interest for other reasons. All records refer to 1997 unless stated otherwise.

ACCEPTED: **Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* Point of Air (Flintshire), 2nd-12th October. **White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* Tregaron (Ceredigion), 12th November. **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* Loch of Strathbeg (Northeast Scotland), 9th May. **Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus* of race *smithsonianus* Sea area Rockall, 11th September. **Gull-billed Tern** *Sterna nilotica* Venus Pool (Shropshire), 19th May; Dunster Beach (Somerset), 4th-5th October. **Snowy Owl** *Nyctea scandiaca* Mangersta, Lewis (Outer Hebrides), 29th May. **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* Sheringham (Norfolk), 20th October; Seaforth (Lancashire), 27th October. **Black-eared Wheatear** *O. hispanica* Fair Isle (Shetland), 17th July to 8th September. **Desert Wheatear** *O. deserti* Beesands (Devon), 25th-26th October; Reculver (Kent), 8th-10th November; Thornton Loch area (Lothian), 9th-13th November; near Clevedon (Avon), 19th November; Beachy Head (East Sussex), 30th November to 5th December. **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella certhiola* Fair Isle, 24th September; 14th October. **Spectacled Warbler** *Sylvia conspicillata* Landguard (Suffolk), 26th April to 2nd May. **Arctic Warbler** *Phylloscopus borealis* Whitby (North Yorkshire), 20th October. **Hume's Warbler** *P. humei* Holme (Norfolk), 22nd October; Sheepcote Valley, Brighton (East Sussex), 16th-22nd November. **Radde's Warbler** *P. schwarzi* St Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay (Orkney), 19th October; Portland (Dorset), 22nd October. **Dusky Warbler** *P. fuscatus* Waxham (Norfolk), 23rd-25th October; Thornton Loch, 6th November. **Yellow-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza aureola* Fife Ness (Fife), 18th October.

M. J. Rogers, Secretary, BBRC, 2 Churchtown Cottages, Towednack, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3AZ

RECENT REPORTS

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan

This summary covers the period from 16th February to 15th March 1998. These are unchecked reports, not authenticated records.

Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia* Adult and first-winter at The Lough (Co. Cork), 22nd-28th February. **Herring Gull** *L. argentatus* Up to three first-winters of North American race *smithsonianus* at Killybegs (Co. Donegal), during 22nd February to 12th March. **Thayer's Gull** *L. thayeri* Adult at Killybegs, 22nd February to 12th March. **Ross's Gull** *Rhodostethia rosea* Second-winter at Briggs Rocks, Groomsport (Co. Down), 9th-29th February. **Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius* Dawlish Warren (Devon), 22nd February. **Alpine Swift** *Tachymarptis melba* Chew Valley Lake (Avon), 18th February; Weston-super-Mare (Avon), 20th February; Budworth Mere (Cheshire), 4th March. **Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* Bosherston, Pembroke (Dyfed), 15th-23rd February; Maer Lake, Bude (Cornwall), 16th February; Baltimore (Co. Cork), 19th February; Christchurch (Dorset), 26th February; Millook (Cornwall), 1st-10th March.

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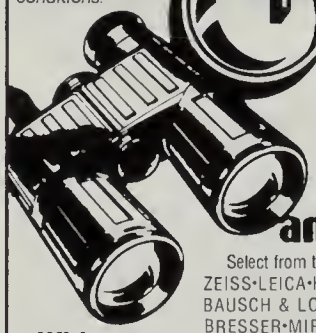

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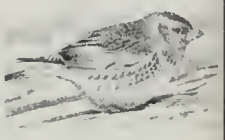

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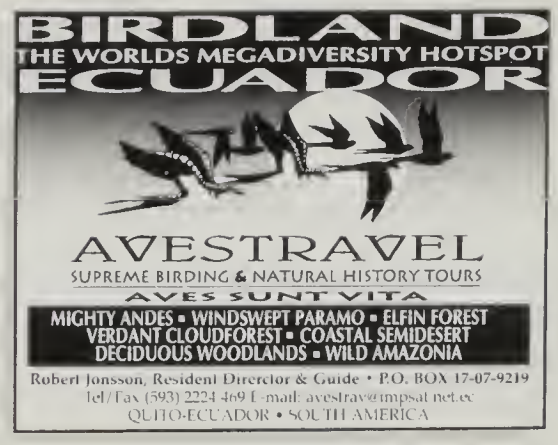

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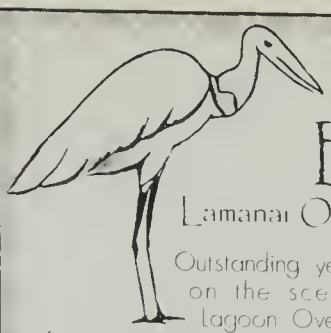

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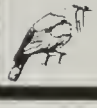

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British Birds

Volume 91 Number 4 April 1998

121 **Rarities Committee news and announcements** *Dr Colin Bradshaw; M. J. Rogers*

123 **Looking back**

124 **Studies of West Palearctic birds** *197* Tree Sparrow *Dr J. Denis Summers-Smith*

Notes

139 Alarm call of Common Coot in response to ground predator *Simon T. Elliott*

139 Common Redshanks using trees as high-water roost *R. M. R. James*

140 Reaction of Common Greenshanks and Eurasian Curlew to Grey Squirrel *J. J. Garr*

140 Common Terns nesting on roofs in Suffolk *Neville Skinner*

142 Fighting Magpies surrounded by others watching *Robert Burton*

142 Tree Sparrows feeding on elm seeds over protracted period *Johannes Erritzoe*

143 Bullfinches, Greenfinches and Dandelions *J. S. A. Hunter*

144 Use by birds of Rape fields in east Scotland *Dr Adam Watson and Robert Rae*

Letters

146 Dippers' twitch *Dr Alan Prowse*

146 The Cirl Bunting in Britain *R. D. Penhallurick*

149 **Redhead in Nottinghamshire: new to Britain and Ireland** *M. C. Dennis*

Obituary

155 Colin Tubbs (1937-1997) *Norman Pratt and Eddie Wiseman*

156 **Monthly marathon**

157 **Short reviews**

159 **Mystery photographs** 212 *Peter Lansdown*

161 **News and comment** *Wendy Dickson and Bob Scott*

164 **Recent BBRC decisions** *M. J. Rogers*

164 **Recent reports** *Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan*

Line-drawings: 124 Tree Sparrows (*Kevin Baker*); 149 Redhead and Common Pochards (*Jan Wilczur*)

Front cover: Nesting Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* (*George Woodford*): the original of this month's cover design, measuring 16.9 × 16.7 cm, is for sale in a postal auction (see page 66 for procedure).

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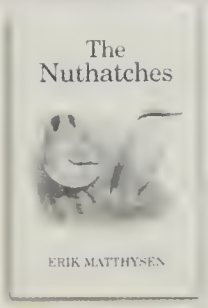

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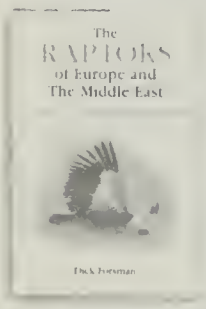

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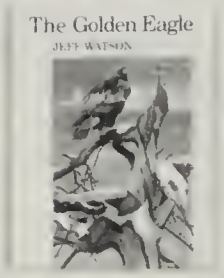

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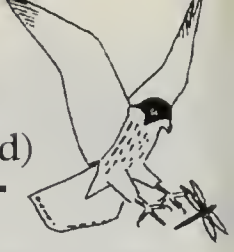

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Hybridisation between Lesser Crested and Sandwich Terns in Valencia, Spain, and plumage of offspring

J. Ignacio Dies and Bosco Dies

ABSTRACT Lesser Crested Terns *Sterna bengalensis* have been recorded regularly and in increasing numbers in the Valencian region of eastern Spain since 1989, and hybridisation with Sandwich Tern *S. sandvicensis* was recorded from 1994. The plumage of the hybrid juveniles is described, and compared with other descriptions.

The Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* breeds on sandy or coral islands and low-lying coasts of Libya, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, Pakistan, the Maldive Islands, and from Sulawesi to New Guinea and northern Australia (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). The Mediterranean race *S. b. emigrata* is currently known to breed regularly only off the Libyan coast, with a recent estimate of over 1,700 pairs, and most winter off West African coasts, mainly in Guinea-Bissau (Meininger *et al.* 1994). During migration, this race moves along the shores of North Africa, crossing the southern Mediterranean Sea, mainly from May to June and from August to October (Lewington *et al.* 1991).

During the breeding season, the Lesser Crested Tern is very scarce, though regular, at various localities in the northwest Mediterranean, including the

Camargue in southern France (Blondel & Isenmann 1981), Valli di Comaccio in northeast Italy (Brichetti & Foschi 1990), and the Ebro Delta in northeast Spain (Martinez-Vilalta & Motis 1989). It is recorded especially in nesting colonies of Sandwich Terns *S. sandvicensis*, a species which commenced breeding in the Mediterranean only in the 1950s (Ferrer & Martinez-Vilalta 1993), and the two have interbred and produced hybrid young on several occasions (e.g. Rogers *et al.* 1993; del Hoyo *et al.* 1996).

The first record of Lesser Crested Tern for the Valencian region of eastern Spain (provinces of Castellón, Valencia and Alicante) was in 1989, since when the species has been recorded annually (Dies & Dies 1990-1995). Table 1 (see page 169) lists accepted Valencian records since 1989. During 1994-97, Lesser Crested Terns were present in a ternery in the Racó de l'Olla, a 64-ha saltmarsh reserve within the Albufera de Valencia Natural Park, and hybridisation with Sandwich Terns was confirmed.

Hybridisation records

In 1994, in a Sandwich Tern colony of 44 pairs, an adult male Lesser Crested Tern paired with a female Sandwich Tern. A single egg was laid, and the two parents shared incubation from 4th to 18th July. Thereafter, the male showed no interest in incubation, was seen to copulate with other females, and remained in the colony until last recorded on 13th August. The female continued to incubate until, following long daily absences to forage and feed, she deserted on 15th August. Two adult Lesser Crested Terns, the second in advanced moult, were observed at the same time on 14th July.

In 1995, the colony held 160 pairs of Sandwich Terns. Although at least one adult Lesser Crested Tern was recorded from 27th May, this species showed no indication of breeding until 12th July, when an adult was observed with a flightless juvenile; both were last recorded on 18th July. While there was no direct evidence, hybridisation seemed distinctly possible: the plumage of the juvenile differed from that of fledged juvenile Sandwich Terns, and matched that of a hybrid juvenile in 1996 (described below). Two adult Lesser Crested Terns were observed in the colony on 9th June (Carlos Oltra, verbally).

During 1996, the colony tripled in size, reaching a total of 471 breeding pairs of Sandwich Terns and spilling over on to a second island. A Lesser Crested Tern was first seen on 29th April, and during May formed a pair with a Sandwich Tern (respective sexes not determined). The nest was not seen, but this pair was observed with a whitish, yellowish-billed downy chick on 13th June. The chick was fed by a parent of each species until fully fledged, and was last recorded on 3rd July. The 'overspill' colony held a second hybrid pair from 30th May 1996, the Lesser Crested being a female, which began to lay on 2nd June. Unfortunately, the nest was deserted or preyed upon on 18th June, after a single night-time visit by a mammal (possibly a Fox *Vulpes vulpes*) which caused a small number of casualties. There were very few subsequent sightings of Lesser Crested Terns in this subcolony, the last being of an adult on 27th June.

During 1996, up to five adult Lesser Crested Terns were present in the reserve on 7th June, with several observations of two or three together on other

dates, but only the two in mixed pairs described above were known to have bred.

In 1997, the Sandwich Tern colony reached 552 breeding pairs, occupying three islands, and held two mixed pairs. The first Lesser Crested Tern was recorded on 8th April, displaying courtship behaviour in the colony area, and pair-bond formation with a Sandwich Tern was evident on 14th May. A single egg was laid on 21st May, but this appeared to be infertile as it was incubated for 50 days, by both parents, until finally deserted on 10th July. At the beginning of May, on a different island, a second hybrid pair laid a single egg, which hatched on 26th May; the chick fledged successfully and was last recorded on 27th June. The latest observation of an adult Lesser Crested Tern in 1997 was made on 23rd July.

The description and drawing of hybrid young (fig. 1, on page 168) are based mainly on the 1996 and 1997 offspring, since hybridisation appeared proven in these cases.

Identification of adult Lesser Crested Terns and hybrid offspring

Adults

Lesser Crested Terns have been present in the Racó de l'Olla reserve since 1994, and one of the first tasks was to confirm its identification. This was particularly important in view of the presence of Elegant Tern *S. elegans* in France in the years 1970-88 (Dubois *et al.* 1990), and of a record of that species in the Llobregat Delta in Catalonia, only a few hundred kilometres from the reserve, on 24th-30th April 1993 (Gutierrez *et al.* 1995; *Ardeola* 44: 119-141).

The various key characters given by Malling Olsen & Larsson (1995) were checked on every occasion, and, furthermore, there was no reason to believe that any of the birds observed were themselves hybrids.

All the adult Lesser Crested Terns were similar in size to Sandwich Tern. They had an orange-coloured bill, turning yellowish at the tip through summer, and appearing a little stouter than Sandwich Terns' bills and with an obviously broader base. They were all uniformly coloured above, with the grey rump concolorous with the back and tail; the upperparts were pale grey, similar to those of Sandwich Tern when viewed in direct sunlight, but noticeably darker when in shadow. Elegant Tern was ruled out in all cases by the stout and relatively short bill, the lack of a long drooping crest, and the uniformly grey upperparts lacking any rump contrast.

Hybrid young

The three hybrid offspring observed in 1995, 1996 and 1997 were similar to each other. They were studied at medium distances, and were compared with recently fledged Sandwich Terns. The 1996 hybrid showed a whitish forehead fading into a dark crown just behind the eye (whereas the forehead of recently fledged Sandwich Terns appeared spotted black); the nape was white, hardly contrasting with the mantle; the upperparts were pale, with only a trace of brownish-grey on the centre of the mantle and scapular feathers (unlike the scaled appearance and dark/grey contrast present on the upperparts of recently

Fig. 1. Three-week-old hybrid Lesser Crested *Sterna bengalensis* **× Sandwich Tern** *S. sandvicensis* **(left) and pale Sandwich Tern chick of similar age, Valencia, Spain** *(J. Ignacio Dies)*

fledged Sandwich Terns); the tertials were uniformly patterned, dark-centred and pale-edged (on Sandwich Tern these were barred pale and dark); brown-grey wingbars were visible on the lesser, median and greater coverts, while the primaries were darker than on Sandwich Tern; and the underparts were white. The bill was pale yellow, with a hint of orange at the base. The legs were noticeably fleshy-grey in colour, while those of fledged Sandwich Terns appeared to be blackish.

The 1997 hybrid showed a similar pattern: whitish forehead, with a sandy colour on the crown, dark rear crown, and white nape; pale grey mantle and scapulars with scattered small arrowhead markings; tertials dark-centred and pale-edged; wing-coverts pale grey, showing three brown-grey wingbars; underparts pure white, lacking any hint of the dark breast-band evident on most Sandwich Tern fledglings; bill yellow, with pale tip and reddish base; legs dark grey.

Fig. 1 shows a direct comparison between a three-week-old hybrid chick and a pale Sandwich Tern chick of similar age, drawn from field sketches.

Discussion

The hybrid-fledgling plumage described here does not differ much from that given for fledged Lesser Crested Terns (see, e.g., Malling Olsen & Larsson 1995), and mixed features were not found. It partly matches the description of a hybrid juvenile given by Steele & McGuigan (1989), and the general pattern (pale grey upperparts, dark spots on scapulars, blackish-grey tertials with white edges, grey bars on wing-coverts, dark primaries and white underparts) is the same; but Steele & McGuigan's individual appears to have been somewhat more strongly marked and darker, and in particular with a darker forehead, whereas the Valencian hybrid showed a whitish forehead fading into a dark crown. Other differences relate to the bare parts: dirty yellow bill and black legs in Steele & McGuigan's description, against pale yellow bill (with hint of orange at base) and fleshy-grey or dark grey legs of the Valencian hybrid.

Future observations will shed light on how the adult hybrids will look, if and when they return to the reserve in forthcoming years. In this respect, it is instructive to note the description of a hybrid ringed in a Sandwich Tern colony in Northumberland, England, in summer 1997 and subsequently observed in its first autumn, on 23rd September 1997, on the west coast of France (Jiguet 1997).

Although Lesser Crested Terns were present in the Albufera de Valencia at least in the summers of 1989 and 1990, there was no suitable breeding habitat until the restoration of the Racó de l'Olla reserve from 1992. The creation of flat sandy islands in shallow hypersaline lakes led to an expansion of the local ternery, with Common Terns *S. hirundo* moving from traditional colonies on

reedbed islands (with turf-like substrate) to the newly created islands in the reserve, and increasing from 250 pairs in 1992 to 1,650 pairs in 1996. It also encouraged Sandwich Terns to colonise and breed for the first time in 1993, and this, together with regular breeding by Lesser Crested Tern in the Ebro Delta 100 km to the north, could have attracted the latter species to the reserve.

In south Alicante, the Santa Pola saltpans seem to be a potential breeding site for the species, and several observations, including a winter record from the neighbouring Cape Cervera, have been made along its coast and at the saltpan edges (see table 1). Its potential is reinforced by the presence of Sandwich Terns, of which a breeding attempt by about 30 pairs in 1993 failed only because of the lack of a secure nesting area (Ramos & Aragoneses 1995). It is only a matter of time before conservation efforts afford a safe nesting place in the Santa Pola saltpans.

Table 1. Chronological records of Lesser Crested Terns *Sterna bengalensis* in the Valencian provinces (Castellón, Valencia and Alicante) of eastern Spain.
Records for 1989-93 listed in Dies & Dies (1990-1995); those for 1994 and later unpublished.

Locality	Date(s)	No.	Observer(s)
Albufera de Valencia	20.8.89	1 ad.	B. Dies & J. I. Dies
Albufera de Valencia	21.8.89	1 imm.	B. Dies & J. I. Dies
Albufera de Valencia	10-29.6.90	1 ad.	several observers
Valencia Harbour	28.10.90	1 ad.	M. Verdú, F. J. García & F. Catalá
Cape Cervera	31.1.91	1 imm.	A. J. Ramos
Santa Pola saltpans	1.8.92	1 ad.	A. J. Ramos & A. Saiz
Santa Pola saltpans	9.6.93	1 ad.	A. J. Ramos
Albufera de Valencia	4.7-13.8.94	1-2 ads.	J. I. Dies, C. Oltra & B. Dies
Santa Pola saltpans	9.9.94	1 ad.	A. J. Ramos
Santa Pola saltpans	3.5.95	1 ad.	A. J. Ramos
Albufera de Valencia	27.5-18.7.95	1-2 ads.	several observers
Albufera de Valencia	29.4-4.7.96	1-5 ads.	J. I. Dies
Albufera de Valencia	8.4-23.7.97	1-2 ads.	several observers

It remains to be seen whether the mixed pairs recorded at the Albufera de Valencia and the increasing number of Lesser Crested Terns present there each year will result in the species establishing itself as a regular breeder, or, on the other hand, the low number of individuals will remain the same, despite the increasing breeding numbers of other tern species.

Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to Andrew M. Paterson and John G. Walmsley, who commented very constructively on the manuscript. The Albufera de Valencia Natural Park authorised the publication of the information given here. Carlos Oltra shared long observation periods, and Jacobo Ramos provided detailed information on Alicante records.

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Any photographs (transparencies, colour prints, or black-and-white prints) of 1997 rarities which have not already been submitted should be sent now, please, to Mrs Sheila Cobban, British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

Golden and White-tailed Eagles in Scotland and Norway

Coexistence, competition and environmental degradation

D. J. Halley

ABSTRACT In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both the White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* and the Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* lived in Scotland, but their ranges there were segregated, the latter's distribution seemingly restricted by competition from the White-tailed; Golden Eagles colonised the Scottish range of White-tailed Eagle following that species' extermination in the early twentieth century. In Norway, the breeding ranges of the two species have apparently always overlapped in coastal areas. The diets of Golden Eagles and re-established White-tailed Eagles in Scotland appear to be very similar, largely through the reliance of both species on sheep and deer carrion, whereas, in Norway, these two eagles rely far less on carrion and differ greatly in their diets. Although Golden Eagles are wholly dominant in direct competition, White-tailed Eagles are nevertheless able to outcompete them through having a wider spectrum of available prey. Increased competition and resulting competitive exclusion in western Scotland appear to be a consequence of long-term environmental degradation of the region through deforestation and overgrazing.

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In his classic monograph on the re-establishment of the White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* in Scotland, Love (1983) demonstrated that the former Scottish distributions of Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* and White-tailed Eagles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were largely separate (allopatric), White-tailed being found mainly on the coast and islands, with a few pairs near some inland freshwater bodies, and Golden Eagles in hilly inland districts away from the coastline. Following the White-tailed Eagle's extermination in Scotland in the early twentieth century, the Golden Eagle expanded its range throughout the coastal region and islands, suggesting that it had previously been excluded from these areas by competition from White-tailed Eagles (Love 1983; Watson 1997). The population density of the Golden Eagle is currently highest on the west coast and islands (Watson *et al.* 1992b, Watson & Rae 1993). Recent observations of Golden Eagles being displaced from home ranges in western Scotland by re-established White-tailed Eagle pairs (Watson *et al.* 1992a) suggest that the earlier pattern is re-emerging.

While it has sometimes been suggested (e.g. Watson 1997) that the two species also occupy allopatric ranges in Norway, this is not, in fact, the case. They can, and do, occur together (sympatrically) along most of the western coast of Norway north of Sognefjord (south of which White-tailed is a scarce recoloniser), from larger islands and the main coastline to the innermost parts of fjords; they frequently nest in close proximity, and their home ranges overlap greatly (fig. 1 & plate 47, on page 177). Most winter gatherings of scavenging birds at carcases in these areas contain adults and immatures of both eagle species (Gjershaug *et al.* 1994; Halley & Gjershaug in press; plate 46, on page 175).

The situation in Scotland, where Golden appears to be excluded from certain areas by the presence of White-tailed (competitive exclusion), cannot, therefore, be explained as reflecting an intrinsic feature of the two species' ecology. Given this, it is natural to ask why they were allopatric in western Scotland prior to the White-tailed Eagle's extermination there, and why, with

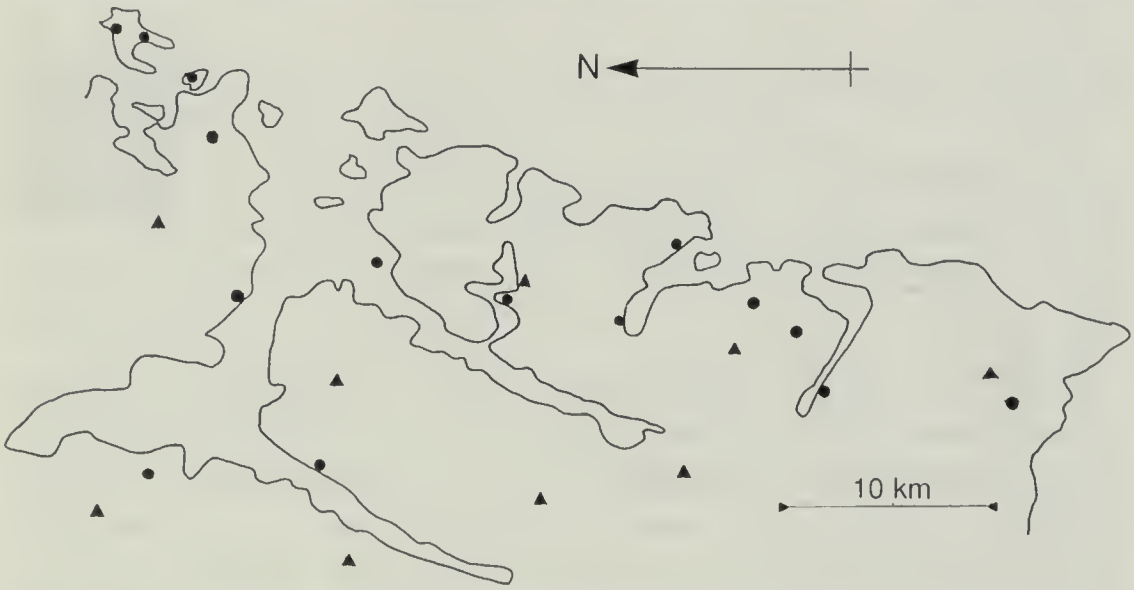

Fig. 1. Breeding locations of White-tailed *Haliaeetus albicilla* (dots) and Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* (triangles) in a region of coastal Norway. White-tailed Eagles tend to nest more closely to shoreline, but the two species' distributions overlap considerably.

the latter's successful re-establishment, a similar pattern of segregation may be appearing again. Comparison of the results of studies in Scotland with those in Norway reveals several factors which have an important bearing on this.

Diet

An important clue emerges when one compares the diets of these two eagles in Scotland and Norway (fig. 2). In coastal Norway, over half of the Golden Eagle's diet is composed of hares *Lepus* (there are no wild Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* in Norway) and grouse (Tetraonidae), with the rest made up mostly of a wide variety of live wild prey; carrion, in the form of sheep and goat carcases, is a minor component. The White-tailed Eagle's diet, on the other hand, is overwhelmingly dominated by fish, seabirds and shorebirds, with ungulate carrion even less important. Dietary overlap between the species is minor. In summer, neither eagle feeds on carrion at all, even when this is readily available (Halley & Gjershaug in press).

In contrast, the diets of Golden and White-tailed Eagles in Scotland are much more similar to each other than they are to that of their respective species in Norway (fig. 2). Carrion (deer and sheep) is important throughout the year, and much of the remainder of the diet is composed of lagomorphs, mainly Rabbits (Watson *et al.* 1992a, 1992b, 1993). Although it is difficult to quantify diets accurately from pellets and prey remains, well over half of the food of each species appears to come from the same sources; the overlap in prey species is more than 90% (Watson *et al.* 1992a).

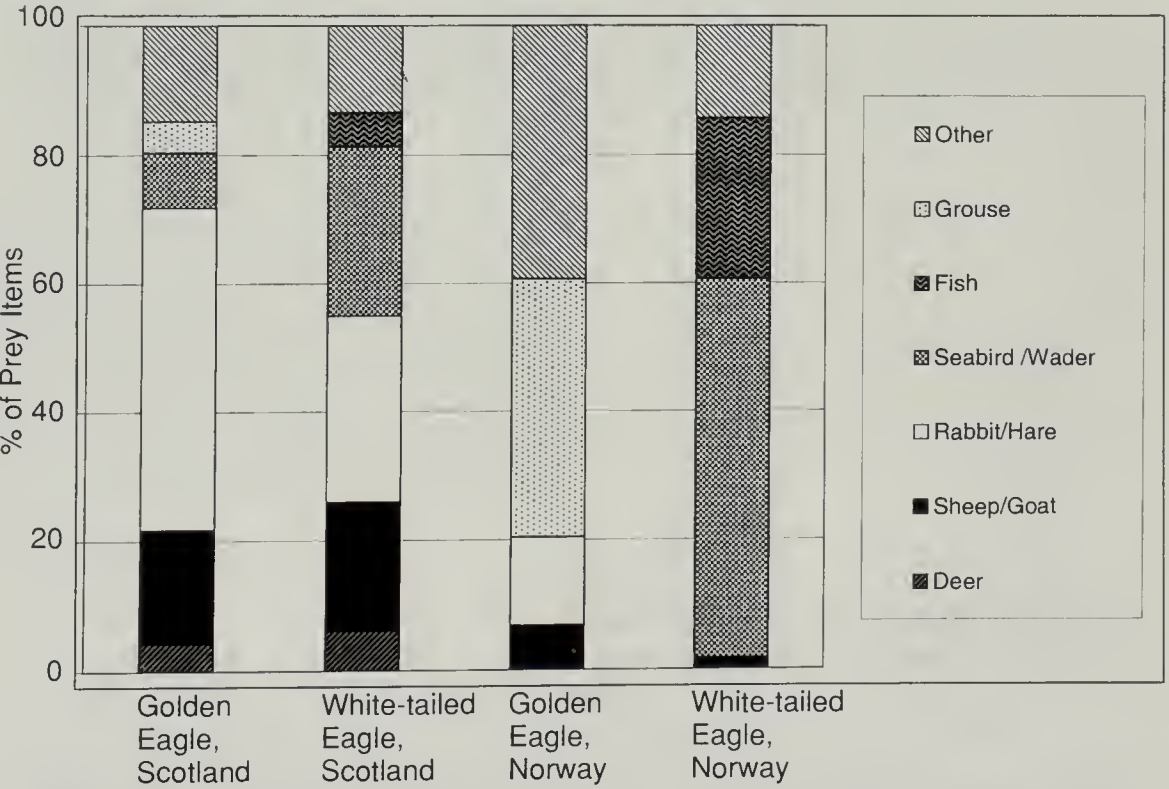

Fig. 2. Diets of White-tailed *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* in western Scotland and coastal Norway, from analysis of pellets and prey remains at eyries. Data for Scotland from Watson *et al.* 1992a; for Norway from Willgohs 1961 (White-tailed Eagle), Gjershaug 1981 (Golden Eagle).

Moreover, a number of White-tailed Eagle attacks on live lambs have been recorded in Scotland, engendering widespread negative publicity (R. Evans *in litt.*). Not a single such attack has ever been confirmed in coastal Norway, despite intensive research into the matter over a number of years (the few alleged attacks either involved scavenging on animals which had suffered natural deaths or, less commonly, were made by Golden Eagles). The White-tailed Eagle has therefore been removed from Norwegian legislation covering compensation for predator damage to stock (Folkestad in press), and farmers in Norway generally ignore this eagle, which often nests and forages close to occupied houses (plate 47).

Direct competition

The population density of Golden Eagles in western Scotland is significantly correlated with carrion availability (Watson *et al.* 1992b), suggesting that this is a limiting resource for the species in the area. White-tailed Eagles are a new and direct competitor for these carrion supplies. It has sometimes been claimed in Britain that White-tailed Eagles are dominant over Golden Eagles: a reasonable assertion, as they are larger, heavier birds, and one which would provide a ready explanation for their displacement of Golden Eagle pairs. The opposite is, however, the case. In direct competition for access to carcases in winter, Golden Eagles are strongly dominant over White-tailed (Halley & Gjershaug in press; fig. 3 & plate 46): in Norway, I once observed a first-winter male displace seven White-tailed Eagles in less than ten seconds, and on no occasion in two winters of observation was a White-tailed Eagle able successfully to defend a carcase from an attacking Golden Eagle; in those few cases where a White-tailed displaced a Golden Eagle, the latter had

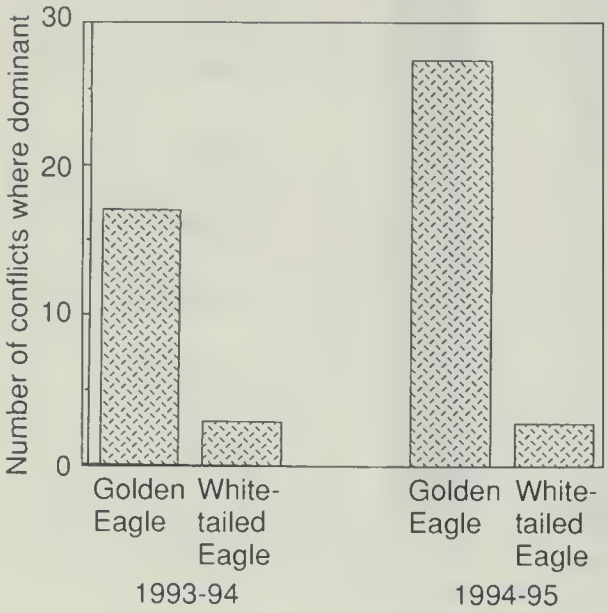

Fig. 3. **Dominance relationships between White-tailed** *Haliaeetus albicilla* **and Golden Eagles** *Aquila chrysaetos* **at carcases in Norway in two winters.** Carcase size was controlled so that only a single bird could feed at one time. Only single conflicts between any two individuals in any one year were included in the data (for details, see Halley & Gjershaug in press).

▲ 46. **Immature Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* **mantling carcase immediately after attacking and displacing an immature White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* (*L. Ramvik*). The White-tailed Eagle can be seen in background, attempting to extricate itself from a snowdrift.

invariably been feeding for some time beforehand. Golden Eagles are also stronger fliers, and have longer legs and a wider talon span (Cramp & Simmons 1980), and they consequently prevail in aerial conflicts (Willgohs 1961; pers. obs.).

The Golden Eagle's dominance appears also to extend to direct competition for nest sites (Willgohs 1961). Nevertheless, where both cliff and tree sites are readily available, as in most of coastal Norway south of the Arctic, White-tailed Eagles show a strong preference for nesting on trees and Golden for nesting on cliffs. In my Trøndelag study area, no Golden Eagles nested on trees, but nine pairs used cliffs; 16 pairs of White-tailed Eagles nested on trees, but only one on cliffs[1]. Competition for nest sites is likely to be of only local significance, at least in Norway.

Indirect competition

The above data may initially suggest that Golden Eagles would competitively exclude White-tailed Eagles in the long term. The evidence from Scotland, however, indicates that it is White-tailed that ousts Golden from home ranges, despite its being inferior in direct competition for resources. The breeding success of White-tailed Eagles in Scotland, which has averaged 0.70 fledged young per pair in recent years (table 1, on page 176), is slightly better than the average (0.65) for the expanding Norwegian population (Folkestad in press).

1. G = 25.3; 1 d.f.; $p<0.00001$.

Table 1. Breeding numbers and fledging success of re-established White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* in Scotland, 1982-96.
Early breeding by inexperienced pairs was poor; but in recent years, with age structure and breeding experience closer to that of natural populations, fledging success exceeded the average (0.65) for the source Norwegian population.
Data from RSPB, G. P. Mudge (*in litt.*) and R. Evans (*in litt.*).

Year	Breeding attempts	Successful attempts	Fledged chicks	Fledged chicks/ breeding attempt
1982-90	57	10	15	0.26
1991	9	4	7	0.78
1992	8	4	7	0.87
1993	8	4	5	0.62
1994	10	4	5	0.50
1995	10	5	7	0.70
1996	12	8	9	0.75
Totals: all years	114	39	55	0.48
1991-96	57	29	40	0.70

Recent population-modelling suggests that, barring unforeseen events, the future for White-tailed Eagles in Scotland is assured (Green *et al.* 1996).

The reason for the White-tailed Eagles' ability ultimately to oust Golden Eagles appears to lie in indirect competition. In western Scotland, White-tailed Eagles enjoy a wider and more varied food base than Golden Eagles; this provides alternative sources of food on which they can rely when main sources are limited. In addition, sheep or deer carcases are not permanently defensible resources; dominance may determine which species eats first, but the White-tailed Eagle will eventually get its fill. Competition for carrion is in its essentials, therefore, indirect (the removal of a later meal for the Golden Eagle), and not direct.

Raptor species adapted relatively more towards a scavenging role and passive sit-and-wait hunting, as is the White-tailed Eagle, typically have a longer, more efficient gut (at the expense of speed and manoeuvrability) than more active hunters such as the Golden Eagle (Barton & Houston 1993). This results in relatively more efficient nutritional use of shared food resources such as carrion: in other words, White-tailed can survive for longer on less food.

Environmental degradation

The wider ecological issue is why the resource base in Scotland should be so very different from, and narrower than, that in Norway, so that interspecific competition is heightened beyond the point where the two eagle species can coexist.

In terms of landforms and geology, western Norway—and specifically coastal Trøndelag, where I conducted my research—is very similar to western Scotland. The climate is also similar, although winters are considerably more severe in Trondelag.

The striking immediate difference between the two regions is in their vegetation. Coastal Norway is heavily wooded (plate 47), and has been so continuously since the end of the last ice age. In contrast, in western Scotland,

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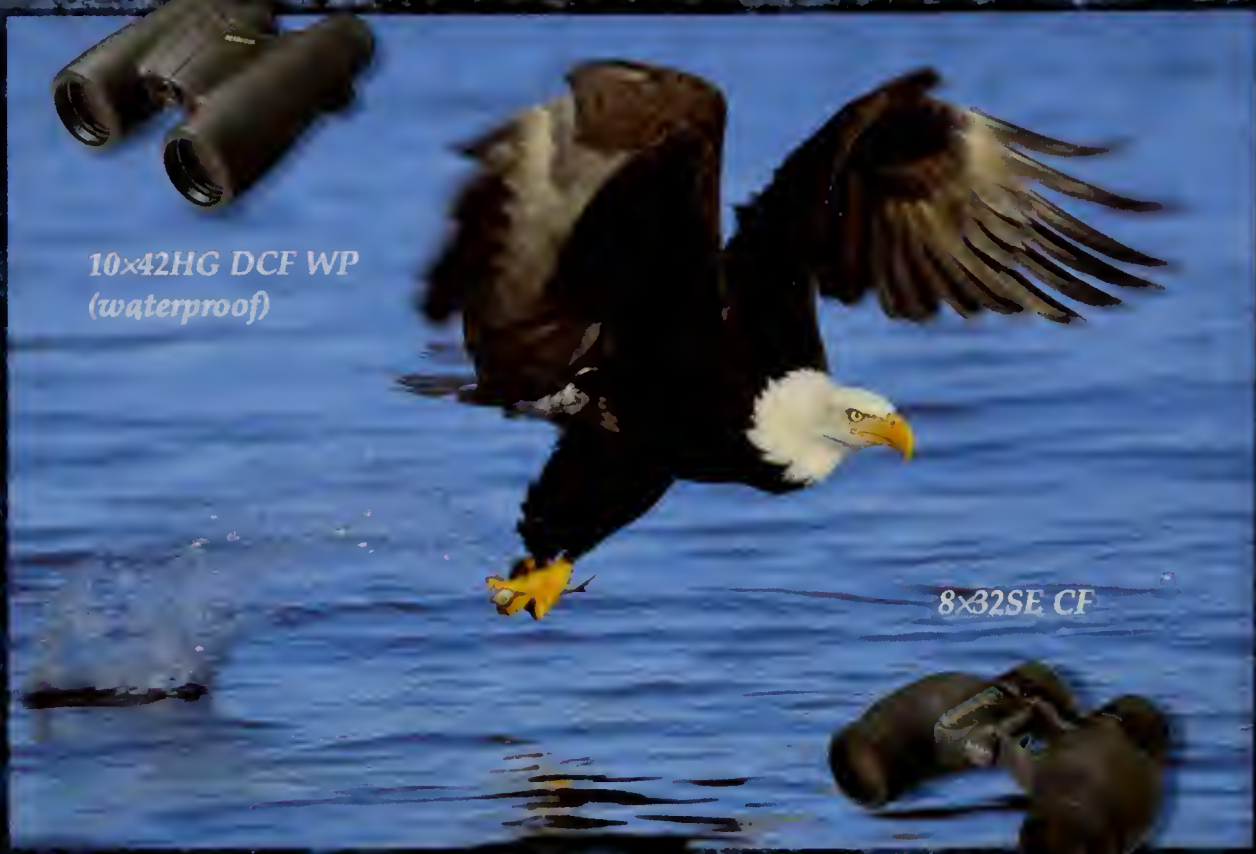

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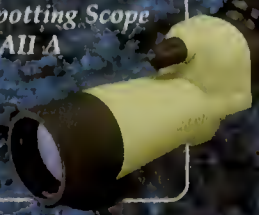

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felling, burning, and overgrazing by sheep and deer removed tree cover almost entirely several centuries ago, and continued overgrazing has ensured that the region remains largely deforested to this day (plate 48). In a cool, wet climate, this has resulted in nutrient-leaching and soil erosion, severely reducing the biological productivity of the land and leading to a degenerative succession from heather moor, now largely absent on the west coast, to poor grass swards and bare scree (Fraser Darling 1955; Sydes & Miller 1988; Hunter 1994). This, in turn, has led to the impoverishment of the region's wild fauna. In

▲ 47. **Typical view in coastal Norway, photographed from an occupied Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* **eyrie** (*D. J. Halley*). Naturally regenerated pine *Pinus* and birch *Betula* forest dominate below treeline (about 350 m a.s.l.). Tip of double-headed promontory in middle distance at left is site of a White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* eyrie, 1.4 km away (note proximity to the farm across the fjord). Both eyrie sites are long established.

▲ 48. **Typical view in the western Highlands, Scotland** (*D. J. Halley*). Vegetation dominated by grasses, with only occasional deciduous trees and bushes persisting in rock crevices and stream gullies where saplings are protected from grazing; a dense block of planted exotic conifers forms the only continuous tree cover.

particular, grouse and hares, the main natural prey of Golden Eagles in both countries, are scarce in western Scotland (Watson *et al.* 1993), and inshore fish stocks are greatly depleted (partly through overfishing, but also through reduced nutrient run-off from the land) in comparison with Norway (Hunter 1994; pers. obs.). The ultimate effect is a narrowed faunal spectrum based on much-reduced primary productivity.

The inability of two large avian predators to coexist in this environment is both a product and a symptom of historically unsustainable land-use practices and consequent environmental degradation. It is an unhappy reflection that this process, although described in detail—along with the long-term consequences of continued neglect—almost half a century ago, continues more or less unabated to the present day. While the future of White-tailed and Golden Eagles in Scotland (in allopatric populations) seems to be assured, the task of their conservation is complicated and their potential population sizes restricted. For wider conservation-management considerations, and rational human land use in general, the current situation illustrates once again that west Highland Scotland is a 'devastated countryside . . . reduced to the crude values and expressions of its geological composition' and that 'no policy which fails to address this unpalatable fact . . . [can] hope to achieve rehabilitation' (Fraser Darling 1955).

Acknowledgments

I should like to thank Livar Ramvik and Jan Ove Gjershaug for assistance with fieldwork in Norway, and in particular for providing detailed knowledge of Golden and White-tailed Eagle breeding distributions on their home patch. Greg Mudge and Richard Evans provided data on the progress of the Scottish White-tailed Eagle re-establishment based on the invaluable long-term monitoring effort of the Scottish Sea Eagle Project Team. Fieldwork by the author was funded by a Royal Society/ESEP post-doctoral fellowship.

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MONTHLY MARATHON

With postal delays affecting some areas, and entries from none of the key players having been received, we have decided to extend the deadline for the nineteenth stage of this ninth 'Monthly marathon' from 15th April to 30th April. The answer, and news of how the leaders fared, will be given next month.

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▲ 49. **'Monthly marathon'**. Photo no. 141. Twenty-first stage in ninth 'Marathon'. Identify the species. *Read the rules* (*Brit. Birds* 90: 66), then send in your answer on a postcard to Monthly Marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ, to arrive by 15th June 1998.

FROM THE RARITIES COMMITTEE'S FILES

A report of Long-toed Stint on South Uist

ZEISS

A small *Calidris* sandpiper was present at North Bay and Ardivachar Point, South Uist, Outer Hebrides (then Western Isles), on 4th-7th September 1990. It was found and identified as a Long-toed Stint *C. subminuta* by T. J. Dix, who submitted the record to the British Birds Rarities Committee. P. R. Boyer and P. S. Read also provided the Committee with descriptions. If accepted, it would have been the second record of the species in Britain and Ireland (although, subsequently, an earlier record was accepted: *Brit. Birds* 88: 512; 89: 12-24). Following three circulations to the Rarities Committee, however, it was rejected on a split vote (at least nine of the ten members of the BBRC have to accept a record on a recirculation for it to be formally accepted). The Committee had no doubt that this bird was either Long-toed Stint or Least Sandpiper *C. minutilla*, but some members felt that there was still some doubt as to whether Least Sandpiper had been sufficiently excluded to justify acceptance of the record as the second for Britain & Ireland. The following account provides some details of the reasons behind this decision.

A full description from the finder has previously been published (*Birding World* 3: 310). Several members of the Committee felt, however, that the description supplied by PRB should be given more weight, since he was the only person to see the bird on more than one occasion: he viewed it on four occasions for a total of 2¾ hours, on three different days, in various light conditions. In contrast, for a variety of reasons, the other observers who submitted descriptions each watched it for no longer than half an hour, on the evening of 4th September only: TJD from 19.00 and PSR from 20.00 in fading light. Nevertheless, all three descriptions were taken into consideration by the Committee. PRB's description is given in full below:

Description

Very small size, much smaller than even the smallest of the Dunlins *C. alpina* alongside on 4th, but had long-legged appearance for size.

LEGS Longish, yellowish-green with noticeably long toes, mid-toe appeared to be longer than tarsus including claw, hind toe was very noticeable and was longer than [that of] any other *Calidris* wader I have seen.

BILL Typical length for stint, slightly decurved with fine tip, blackish, but with slightly paler base to lower mandible.

EYE Dark.

HEAD Crown dark brown with bright rufous/chestnut streaking extending down forehead to top of bill. Fairly broad pale supercilium not joining over bill, but running into paler nape to give a slightly capped appearance. Nape paler grey-brown with dark streaking. Lores paler, streaked very slightly darker.

BODY Upperparts dark brown heavily streaked bright rufous with whitish edges to mantle forming a very distinctive 'V' to back. This mantle V was the most obvious feature in flight. Wing-coverts brown with whitish-buff fringes. Underparts white. Breast pale brown heavily streaked on sides, but with streaking dying out towards centre of breast. Tertials dark brown with rufous fringes completely covered tail.

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FLIGHT Did not appear to be as strong as [that of] Dunlin. White mantle V very noticeable, but wing-bar very weak, with primaries appearing almost completely dark. Tail dark with whitish edges, white edges to dark rump. Toes extended beyond tail in flight.

GENERAL Very small (tiny) *Calidris* wader, size of stint but more resembling Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* in shape, posture and long-legged appearance.

Whilst feeding, walked with a very rail-like gait [recalling crake or rail (Rallidae)] and would sometimes feed with extended neck posture. Between feeding spells, would run rapidly over short distances before again returning to feeding. The bird was very aggressive towards small waders (Dunlin, Sanderling *C. alba*, Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*) on 4th September, whilst feeding on a very crowded beach. This was not noted on subsequent days.

When alarms affected the other waders, the stint generally took no notice, although on occasions it would crouch and was twice noted to adopt a very upright Ruff-like stance [i.e. recalling *Philomachus pugnax*] which it maintained for several seconds before returning to feeding.

The bird fed preferably from the edges of small saltwater pools or seaweed tangles and appeared to be picking small items off the surface rather than probing for food.

It appeared to be associating more with the party of [Red] Knots *C. canutus* rather than Dunlins or Curlew Sandpipers (especially on 5th & 6th), but was seen alongside Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Sanderling and Knot.

OBSERVATION TIMES AND AIDS 4/9/90 19.55-20.35 tide high; good light at first; bird feeding on tangles and saltwater pools at top of beach; min. distance 15 m. 5/9/90 08.30-08.45 tide high; good light; feeding on tangles on sandy beach. 5/9/90 10.50-12.10 tide low; excellent light; feeding on pools in rotting seaweed at top of beach; min. distance 10 m. 6/9/90 12.50-13.20 tide low; conditions appalling: NW gale; feeding at junction of beach and dunes; beach swept clean of all weed by gales. Optical aids 25 × 60 *Mirador* telescope and 10 × 50 binoculars.

EXPERIENCE Most small waders, including Little *C. minuta* and Temminck's Stint *C. temminckii* and Semipalmated Sandpiper *C. pusilla*, but no experience of either Long-toed Stint or Least Sandpiper.

P. R. Boyer

First circulation (January to April 1991)

During the first circulation, four members 'pended' the record (i.e. postponed voting, pending the receipt of further information). Of the six members who accepted the record, one cited gait and posture, middle toe as long as or longer than the tarsus, and toes extending beyond tail in flight, dark of crown extending to bill, bright rufous-and-black upperparts and conspicuous whitish 'V', and pale base to lower mandible. Two other members pointed out that the contrast between mantle and the wing-coverts was suggestive of Long-toed Stint. CB, voting last, however, added to the file photographs of juvenile Least Sandpipers showing rail-like posture, dark of crown extending to bill and bright rufous-and-black upperparts with prominent white 'V'. All the members agreed that, for a major rarity, especially one in a notoriously difficult group, descriptions need to be exceedingly detailed. The voting was six accepts and no rejects, but four 'pends' for further information from observers who had seen it later (6 : 0 : 4).

Second circulation (July to October 1992)

There were additional notes in the second circulation, but, through no fault of the observer involved, they added nothing to the picture. There was some discussion as to whether the Committee was being too demanding by expecting every character to be covered in the descriptions, but several members

▲ 50. Least Sandpipers can look very different depending on pose: right-hand bird slim, with a lot of visible tibia; left plump, with almost no visible tibia.

▲ 51. Rail-like posture, sometimes quoted as typical of Long-toed Stint, is common to both Least Sandpiper and Long-toed Stint. This juvenile Least also shows extraordinary length of toes, particularly central toe.

▲ 52. When anxious, Least Sandpiper can stretch up and look very long-legged and long-necked, resembling classic *Tringa*-stance of Long-toed Stint.

▲ 53. About 10% of juvenile Least Sandpipers show contrast between chestnut fringes to scapulars and beige edges to coverts; on a few, this contrast is very obvious.

▲ 54. On a few juvenile Least, cap reaches across forehead to bill, thus stopping supercilia from meeting across forehead. Note rich chestnut upperparts and prominent mantle line on bird facing away.

▲ 55. Juvenile Least Sandpiper is a very bright bird. Combination of black feather-centres and rich-chestnut edges with some white tips on the scapulars produces a quite startling upperpart coloration.

suggested that, in this case, rigorous assessment was essential. It was, after all, potentially only the second record for Britain & Ireland, and, even though Long-toed Stint had 'broken through the credibility gap', it was felt that the Committee should accept only very detailed descriptions for this species and other rare peeps as 'peeps have a history of mistaken identifications, even with photos and/or prolonged observation'. PGL, then Chairman of the BBRC, summed up the situation at the end of the circulation: 'We are all agreed that this is either Long-toed Stint or Least Sandpiper . . . the descriptions are, for a rare stint/peep, not as detailed as required, but the most important consideration is whether or not there is sufficient for a firm identification.' The voting was four accepts, five rejects and one pend (4 : 5 : 1).

Third circulation (November 1992 to May 1993)

There was no new evidence available for the final circulation. The opposing views were summarised by CB (against acceptance) and PGL (for acceptance). Those against acceptance looked critically at PRB's description and felt that Least Sandpiper had not been excluded, as some features suggested Least, some favoured Long-toed and some were unhelpful, but no features were diagnostic. The absence of a split supercilium favoured Least Sandpiper, whilst the legs being yellowish-green rather than chrome-yellow, and the rail-like gait, were marginally in favour of Least Sandpiper. Both species, can, however, adopt both 'rail-like' and 'Wood Sandpiper-like' postures. Plate 50 shows just how much the posture of Least Sandpiper can vary, whilst plates 51 & 52 show Least Sandpiper in rail-like pose and Long-toed Stint-like pose. Toe length, especially the projection beyond the tail in flight, was strongly in favour of Long-toed Stint (although Least Sandpiper also has abnormally long toes, see plate 51), whilst the capped appearance and the Wood Sandpiper-like stance were features marginally pro Long-toed Stint. The contrast between the mantle and the wing-coverts, as reported by both PRB and PSR, was not so obvious as one would expect on Long-toed Stint, but that feature was, on balance, more compatible with Long-toed Stint than with Least Sandpiper. Subsequent observations by CB of large numbers of Least Sandpipers in Atlantic Canada in August 1993 revealed that a proportion shows at least as much contrast as described for this bird (see plate 53). PRB—the only observer to study the bird for more than 30 minutes—described the bill as blackish but with a slightly paler base to the lower mandible, which those opposing acceptance felt was either not typical of Long-toed Stint, which shows a yellow base to the lower mandible, or too imprecise as evidence for either species. The loral pattern was not described in sufficient detail to be helpful; and the cap reaching the bill was a feature of both species (plate 54). None of the observers had seen a juvenile of either species and the observers' assertions that this bird was 'very bright' whereas Least Sandpiper was 'a plain bird' may be true for adults, but it would be difficult to describe juvenile Least Sandpiper as 'plain' (see plate 55). The case against acceptance was

FACING PAGE
Plates 50-55 all show Least Sandpipers *Calidris minutilla* photographed in Canada in August 1988 or August 1993 by Colin Bradshaw.

summarised to the effect that, although most of the features were in favour of Long-toed Stint, Least Sandpiper had not been sufficiently excluded.

Those in favour of acceptance took a different view. They considered that toe-length (especially projection beyond tail in flight) and mantle/wing-covert contrast were diagnostic of Long-toed Stint, whilst the loral pattern was strongly suggestive of that species. The paler bill-base and the dark crown extending to the bill favoured Long-toed Stint, but not to the positive exclusion of Least Sandpiper, and all other features were 'neutral'. No characters firmly supported identification as Least Sandpiper, as neither yellow-green legs nor the absence of a split supercilium were incompatible with Long-toed Stint. The case for acceptance was summarised to the effect that, with several pro features and no con, the identification was safe, and acceptance of the record was recommended.

The voting on the third circulation was seven for acceptance (although two admitted to having some misgivings) and three for rejection, on the grounds that Least Sandpiper was not excluded (7 : 3 : 0). Since it did not achieve the necessary nine votes in favour, the record was not accepted (*Brit. Birds* 90: 520).

Fourth circulation (November 1994 to January 1996)

Subsequent to this decision, we received a submission from Major W. D. Oldham. Unfortunately, his description relied on memory rather than contemporary notes, as his field notebook had been lost during subsequent census work. Although he described several key features, the Committee felt that it should not consider such precise details without supporting notes, as the original sighting had taken place three years earlier. Prior to this circulation, two additional members had joined the Committee. Although no formal vote was taken, the two new members, considering all the evidence and the comments by their current and past colleagues, commented: 'Reading all this three or four times, it is my strong view that the Committee reached the correct decision' and 'I agree that the Committee has acted wisely on this record.'

Excluding these two new members, who did not record their personal votes, a total of 12 members voted during the three circulations. Summing their final votes (not a method employed by the Committee to determine acceptance or otherwise), there was a total of nine for acceptance as Long-toed Stint and three for rejection (on the grounds that the possibility of Least Sandpiper was not eliminated). Several of the nine in favour of acceptance support the record very strongly. As always, however, the Committee errs on the side of caution, and, with three members still not supporting the record even after the third circulation and many hundreds of words of comment (the file now weighs 600g), non-acceptance was inevitable.

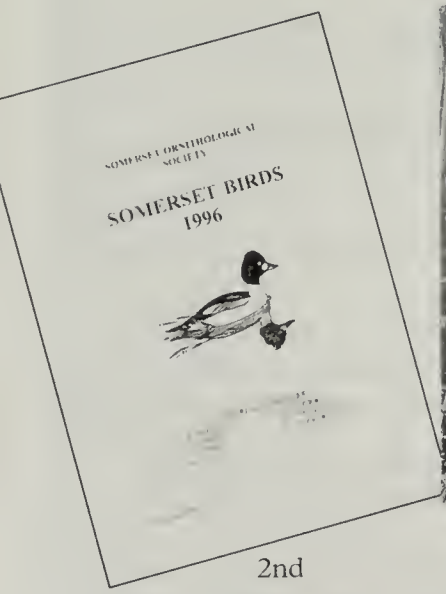
As with all records, however, the Committee's decision is not absolutely final. When more is known about the identification characteristics of Long-toed Stint and Least Sandpiper, the BBRC or the observers (or both) may decide that it would be worthwhile to review this very interesting report.

Colin Bradshaw and Peter G. Lansdown
9 Tynemouth Place, North Shields, Tyne & Wear NE30 4BJ

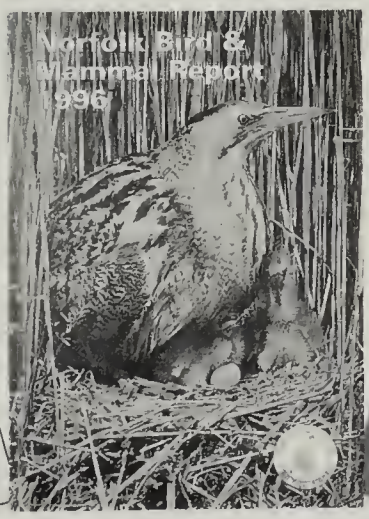
The Best Annual Bird Report Awards

As we announced last year (*Brit. Birds* 90: 177-179), the judges' votes and comments were summarised for the benefit of bird report editors in *newsACRE*, the newsletter of the Association of County Recorders and Editors. Responses from editors included several suggestions for modifying the criteria upon which reports are judged, and, in consultation with the Secretary of ACRE, Michael J. Rogers, most of these were adopted this year. The most radical change was a doubling of points allotted to the vital Systematic List, with each judge allocating ten votes (0 to 5 for its interest and readability for today's readers, and 0 to 5 for its value for reference purposes for posterity).

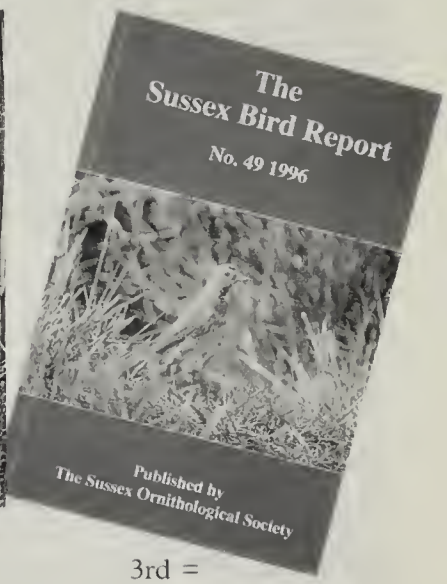
1st



2nd



3rd =



3rd =

This year's winner, *Dorset*, achieved the extraordinarily high score of 93%. Judges particularly commented on its 'exceptional Systematic List', 'excellent maps' and 'superb section on "Escaped/feral species"'. *Somerset* was not only a close second, but was also by far the highest placed of reports published by

medium-sized organisations (with 200-400 members). *Norfolk* has been in the top three in two previous years. Also in joint third place, *Sussex* impressed, and the judges particularly liked the use of tone to highlight tables within the text. A mere two percentage points behind the leaders, *Greater Manchester* was top in the small-membership category (under 200 members). The judges also wished to congratulate *Isle of Wight* on achieving the high position of equal eleventh, with a creditable 76%, with the island's first combined report produced in co-operation between the Isle of Wight Ornithological Group and the Isle of Wight Natural History & Archaeological Society.

The high standard of county bird reports is now firmly established. Once again, however, the judges were disappointed by those produced by the bird observatories. Top was *Fair Isle*, with 51%. We do suggest that those responsible for the production of the observatories' reports take a look at some of the best county reports, which are listed at the end of this text.

Several correspondents writing to ACRE suggested that the ineligibility of reports not published within 12 months of the end of the year was too severe a restriction. The judges discussed this and agreed that, in future, all annual reports published within the 12 months since the previous judging would be eligible, but that those achieving publication within the 12-month timescale would receive bonus points. We hope, therefore, that *every* annual report published in 1998 will be submitted for our perusal.

Table 1. The top ten annual bird reports for 1996.

Position	County (with positions in 1990-95)	Editors	Score
1st	*Dorset* (– 12 – 11 – –)	Vaughan Ashby	93%
2nd	*Somerset* (– – – – – 11)	Brian D. Gibbs	88%
3rd=	*Norfolk* (3 23 24 9 1 –)	Michael J. Seago	86%
3rd=	*Sussex* (– 10 – – – –)	Lawrence G. Holloway	86%
5th=	*Avon* (– 5 9 – 1 –)	A. H. Davis	85%
5th=	*Isles of Scilly* (– – 12 – – 10)	Peter Robinson	85%
7th=	*Cheshire & Wirral* (8 10 9 5 8 –)	D. J. Steventon, A. M. Broome & S. Barber	84%
7th=	*Greater Manchester* (– – – – – 11)	Mrs A. J. Smith	84%
7th=	*Leicestershire & Rutland* (– – –14–7)	A. J. MacKay	84%
10th	*Oxfordshire* (– – – – 9 –)	Ian Lewington	81%

This year's best reports can be obtained as follows:

DORSET Mrs W. Adams, 16 Sherford Drive, Wareham, Dorset BH20 4EN (£7.00 incl. p&p)

SOMERSET Tony Parsons, Barnfield, Tower Hill Road, Crewkerne, Somerset TA18 8BJ (£5.00 incl. p&p)

NORFOLK Mrs M. J. Dorling, 6 New Road, Hethersett, Norfolk NR9 3HH (£7.00)

SUSSEX John Trowell, Lorrimer, Main Road, Icklesham, Winchelsea, East Sussex TN36 4BS (£7.00 incl. p&p)

AVON Dr H. E. Rose, 12 Birbeck Road, Bristol BS9 1BD (£4.50 + 50p p&p)

ISLES OF SCILLY Peter Robinson, Riviera House, Parade, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly TR21 0LP (£5.00)

CHESHIRE & WIRRAL D. J. Steventon, Welland House, 207 Hurdsfield Road, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK10 2PX (£4.50)

GREATER MANCHESTER Mrs A. J. Smith, 12 Edge Green Street, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Wigan WN4 8SL (£4.50 + 50p p&p)

LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND Mrs S. Graham, 5 Brading Road, Leicester LE3 9BG (£5.50 incl. p&p)
OXFORDSHIRE Roy Overall, 30 Humsdon Road, Iffley, Oxford OX4 4JE (£5.00)

J. T. R. Sharrock (BB), Robert Gillmor (SWLA), R. A. Hume (BBRC), Derek Moore (BTO) and Michael J. Rogers (ACRE)
c/o Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ

CONSERVATION RESEARCH NEWS

Compiled by Mark Avery, Lennox Campbell and Ken Smith

This feature, contributed by the RSPB's Research Department, reports the most interesting recent scientific news relevant to the conservation of Western Palearctic species.

First UK survey of breeding Greenshanks

Although studied intensively by Desmond Nethersole Thompson and his family, the Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* has never before been systematically surveyed in Britain. In 1995, a team funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the RSPB, appropriately including one of the Thompson family, conducted a survey throughout the Greenshank's UK breeding range. A sample of 101 5-km squares (8% of the breeding range) was surveyed and the population estimated at 1,440 summering pairs, of which 1,080 occupied breeding territories, and 870 were estimated to have had young.

Hancock, M. H., Gibbons, D. W., & Thompson, P. S. 1997. The status of breeding Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* in the United Kingdom in 1995. *Bird Study* 44: 290-302.

Mixed-up Stone-curlews?

The Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* has declined markedly in numbers and range over the last 50 years, with a current UK population of fewer than 200 pairs largely restricted to Wessex and the Brecklands of East Anglia. For many years, RSPB wardens have worked with landowners to protect nests from destruction by agricultural operations and thus to increase breeding success. As a result, the main Breckland population is increasing in numbers, although the Wessex population is responding only slowly.

If Breckland and Wessex Stone-curlews spend the winter in different places, this could contribute to the difference in population trend. Dr Rhys Green and Dave Hodson of the RSPB and Paul Holness, a ringer and long-standing Stone-curlew enthusiast, analysed Stone-curlew ringing recoveries. The migration and wintering

areas—through western France into Spain and north Africa—were already well known, but this study indicates that both the Wessex and the Breckland breeding populations of Stone-curlews take the same route. The focus for research into differences in population trend between Breckland and Wessex should therefore continue to be the breeding areas.

Some juveniles move between Breckland and Wessex. Such interchange could be facilitated by mixing of populations on the wintering grounds. There may also be movements between the UK and the near Continent, but these would be extremely difficult to detect at present. The fact that the two main UK populations exchange individuals and share migration routes and wintering quarters suggests, however, that UK Stone-curlew 'populations' are more mixed up than we might have thought.

GREEN, R. E., HODSON, D. P., & HOLNESS, P. R. 1997. Survival and movements of Stone-curlews *Burhinus oedicnemus* ringed in England. *Ringing & Migration* 18: 102-112.

Waders around the World

Ringing recoveries show that wading birds often undertake prodigious migrations, but ringing remains a fairly blunt instrument to study the details of migration, relying as it does on handling birds at least twice. Three recent papers describe the use of low-powered short–range radio tags to gather more detailed information on speed and timing of migration over thousands of kilometres.

Professor Peter Evans of Durham University used 1.7-g radio tags (2.5-3.5% of body mass) to track Sanderlings *Calidris alba* from Teesmouth to their refuelling sites in Iceland. In 1995, four out of six individuals tagged in the UK were relocated in Iceland, but in 1996 only one out of 12 was found, although this one did the 1,500-km journey in 41 hours.

Dr George Iverson and collaborators used 1-g radio tags (2-3% of body mass) to locate Western Sandpipers *Calidris mauri* from San Francisco Bay to Alaska. Using light aircraft fitted with radio receivers, they relocated 64 of the 87 tagged birds. The birds took, on average, 7.7 days to complete the 3,250-km journey, probably by a series of short hops.

Even more remarkable were the Pacific Golden Plovers *Pluvialis fulva* fitted with 1.65-g radio tags (<1% of body mass) on their wintering sites in Hawaii by Dr Oscar Johnson and colleagues and relocated on their spring staging areas in Alaska. One was found in Alaska only 90 hours after leaving its territory in Hawaii: a flight of 4,500 km over the Pacific Ocean at a minimum average speed of 50 km/hour. It was also particularly pleasing that the tags did not adversely affect the survival rate of the birds: 19 of the 20 birds tagged in one winter returned to their territories on Hawaii in the subsequent year.

These studies show that, with a little ingenuity, it is possible to use extremely light short-range tags to study the movements of birds on a global scale without measurable adverse effects on the birds. Satellite tags, being much heavier than standard radio tags, are still out of the question for all but the heaviest birds. Lighter, cheaper and more powerful radio tags could help to unlock more of the details of bird migration. This would be fascinating in its own right, but would also, almost certainly, allow better conservation of migratory species through a better knowledge of their use of sites throughout the year.

EVANS, P. R. 1996. Radio-controlled sanderlings. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 80: 6.

IVERSON, G. C., WARNOCK, S. E., BUTLER, R. W., BISHOP, M. A., & WARNOCK, N. 1996. Spring migration of Western Sandpipers along the Pacific coast of North America: a telemetry study. *Condor* 98: 10-21.

JOHNSON, O. W., WARNOCK, N., BISHOP, M. A., BENNETT, A. J., JOHNSON, P. M., & KIENHOLZ, R. J. 1997. Migration of radio-tagged Pacific Golden Plovers from Hawaii to Alaska, and their subsequent survival. *Auk* 114: 512-524.

Dr Mark Avery, Dr Lennox Campbell and Dr Ken Smith, Research Department, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL

REVIEWS

The Atlas of Southern African Birds. vol. 1. Non-passerines; vol. 2. Passerines.

Edited by J. A. Harrison, D. G. Allan, L. G. Underhill, M. Herremans, A. J. Tree, V. Parker & C. J. Brown.

BirdLife South Africa, Johannesburg, 1997. vol. 1. 785 pages; over 500 line-drawings & maps. ISBN 0-620-20730-2. vol. 2. 732 pages; over 900 line-drawings & maps. ISBN 0-620-20731-0. ISBN for the set 0-620-20729-9. SA Rands 645.

Atlases of bird distribution have advanced rapidly in recent years, becoming ever more sophisticated. This magnificent two-volume atlas is the result of a huge collaborative effort incorporating a vast amount of data from six southern African countries. More than seven million individual records were collected by thousands of observers, and analysed using the most advanced computer technology. The atlassing period varied regionally, but the entire project took 11 years to complete.

After a lengthy introduction, most of the two volumes comprises the 932 species accounts, which have been compiled by 60 authors. Accounts are typically two pages in length, with a large map which is coded according to reporting rates. The maps are based on quarter-degree squares (except for Botswana, which is mapped by half-degree squares). In addition, graphs show models of seasonality (occurrence and breeding), and bar charts depict habitat choice. The text gives up-to-date summaries of current knowledge. A few species merit a third page, with six seasonal distribution maps, while some species are given only a single page, with shorter text and a smaller map. Vagrants are treated in condensed accounts without maps, and are grouped together at the end of each volume.

This publication sets new standards in atlas production. It is a truly impressive work which provides a sound basis for all future studies of bird distribution in southern Africa. If you have more than a passing interest in African birds, you must have this book.

Nigel Redman

From Flying Toads to Snakes with Wings. By Karl P. N. Shuker. (Llewellyn Publications, Minnesota, 1997. 222 pages. ISBN 1-56718-673-4. Paperback £10.99) This is Dr Shuker's follow-up to his *The Lost Ark: new and rediscovered animals of the twentieth century* (1993, reviewed *Brit. Birds* 87: 182). Now, he concentrates on the more obscure cryptozoological puzzles: the animals for which evidence varies from the inconclusive to the vague, flimsy or frankly non-existent. Personally, I would rather have had more details of the 'probables' and far less space wasted on the 'highly unlikelys'. *JTRS*

A Birder's Guide to Idaho. Edited by Dan Svingen & Kas Dumroese. (American Birding Association, Colorado, 1997. 352 pages. ISBN 1-878788-14-0. Wire-O binding $18.95) Although abundant in species, Idaho is little known in the birding world, owing in part to its remoteness and lack of published site information. Svingen & Dumroese, utilising the expertise of local birders, have produced a guide to provide the essential detailed maps, site information, and most importantly a seasonal and regional checklist with specifics for locating rarities and specialities. Birders seeking Idaho's diverse avifauna will find this guide invaluable. *Judy Davis*

ALSO RECEIVED

The Birds of St Lucia. By Allan R. Keith. BOU Checklist No. 15. (BOU, Tring, 1997. 176 pages. ISBN 0-907446-19-1. £14.00)

Birds in Mosaics: a study of the representation of birds in the Hellenistic and Romano-Campanian tessellated mosaics to the Early Augustan Age. *Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae vol. XVIII.* By Antero Tammisto. (Instituti Romani Finlandiae, Helsinki, 1997. 603 pages. ISBN 951-96902-4-7. Paperback. No price given)

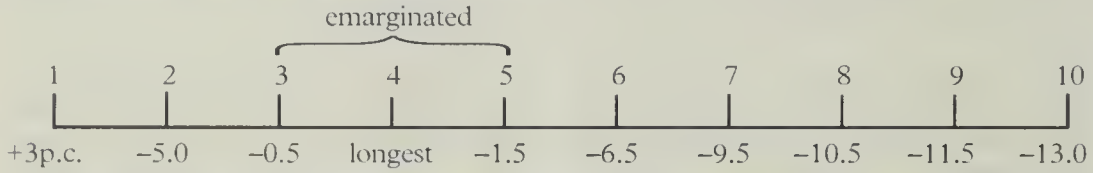
Cage and Aviary Bird Survival Manual: a comprehensive family-by-family guide to keeping cage and aviary birds. By Graham Wellstead. (Blandford, London, 1997. 160 pages. ISBN 0-7137-2678-4. £14.99)

LETTER

Mystery warblers in Tselinograd: an attempt to solve part of the problem

When one of us (NDvS) saw plates 15-17, 22 & 23 in *British Birds* (90: 142-147, 152-158), taken in May 1984 in Kazakhstan, portraying a particularly large-eyed warbler, described by Dr Colin Bradshaw and Dr Jimmy Steele as 'pale pot-bellied birds with a prominent supercilium, short undertail-coverts and perhaps white outer tail feathers', he instantly remembered having seen such a bird before. On 3rd May 1989, he, PdeK and Gerrit Goedhart trapped a similar bird on the Maasvlakte in Rotterdam, Netherlands (plates 56-62). Initially, we thought that this bird was a Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* of the eastern race *yakutensis*. A closer look revealed that it was a *Hippolais*, and we decided that it was an Olivaceous Warbler *H. pallida* of either the race *elaeica* or a hitherto undescribed eastern race. It was described as follows:

Small, drab, grey bird, faintly olive on rump and edges of secondaries (in line with Svensson's description (1994) for *elaeica* from the eastern part of its range); a broad white supercilium in front of eye reaching just behind eye; underwing-coverts white; underparts white, suffused greyish on flanks and sides of breast; white undertail-coverts short; shorter outer tail feather with pale outer web; upper mandible dark horn, with yellow cutting edge; lower mandible largely yellow; mouth orange-yellow; legs grey-brown; weight 10 g; wing 63 mm, tarsus 19 mm, tail 46 mm; very large dark-brown eye in angular setting (see also plate 236 in Shirihai 1987); very short bill, 12.3 mm to skull and 7.6 mm to feathers.



The large eye and distinct supercilium in combination with a short bill cannot be traced in other published descriptions and/or photographs of *Hippolais p. elaeica* (see, e.g., Shirihai *et al.* 1996), yet, with the existing literature and knowledge (e.g. Williamson 1963), *elaeica* is the closest in appearance. We feel confident that the bird here described represents an until now unknown species of *Hippolais*: the *Hippolais* with the big eyes. If that proves to be so, we shall propose the name *Hippolais magnioculi*, Bradshaw's Warbler.

We should like to thank Drs Pauline de Jong for her kind assistance.

Peter de Knijff and Norman D. van Swelm
Voorne Bird Observatory, PO Box 305, 3233 ZG Oostvoorne, Netherlands

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[*Brit. Birds* 91: 190-191, May 1998] © British Birds Ltd 1998

icterina *polyglotta*

▲ 56-62. Warbler trapped at Maasvlakte, Netherlands, on 3rd May 1989 (56, 59-62 *Norman D. van Swelm*; 57 & 58 *Peter de Knijff*)
▲ 63. Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*, Netherlands, May 1989 (*Norman D. van Swelm*)
▲ 64. Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*, Netherlands, May 1989 (*Norman D. van Swelm*)

MYSTERY PHOTOGRAPHS

▲ 65. Mystery photograph 213A.

▲ 66. Mystery photograph 213B.

213 It is perhaps surprising that the mainly sedentary Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*, which breeds no closer to Britain than Iberia, Sardinia, Corsica, Croatia and Romania, has been recorded four times in England and once each in Scotland and Wales up to the end of 1996. It is less surprising that all six British records have involved adult males. The rich chestnut crown, contrasting white cheeks, black-striped mantle and scapulars with conspicuous creamy-white braces, and extensive, black streaking on the breast and flanks of male Spanish Sparrow enable it to be distinguished with ease from the familiar male House Sparrow *P. domesticus*. Separating the females of the two species is, however, far less straightforward. Mystery photograph A, taken by Dr Richard Chandler, shows a female House Sparrow in Kent in November 1989, while mystery photograph B, taken by Robin Chittenden, shows a female Spanish Sparrow in Israel in December 1994.

For much of the year, female House Sparrow's underparts are unmarked. When in worn plumage, however, which can be from as early as July to as late as November, some individuals show thin, dark streaks on the flanks and breast, while others are also streaked on the belly. The underparts of female Spanish Sparrow are highly variable. Normally, the flanks are broadly and diffusely lined with grey, and the breast displays similar, though rather more crisply defined, lines or a dappled appearance caused by a rash of clear, grey dots; sometimes, the belly is sparsely streaked darker, too. With their additional characters of paler underparts, including a whiter belly, and larger dark centres to the undertail-coverts, female Spanish Sparrows, including comparatively poorly marked ones, which are invariably individuals in fresh plumage, are distinctively patterned below at all seasons. Plate 67 shows a particularly well-marked female House Sparrow, while plate 68 illustrates the more neatly patterned underparts of a female Spanish Sparrow.

The upperparts also provide important characters of separation. Females of both species are striped on the sides of the mantle and the upper scapulars.

[*Brit. Birds* 91: 192-194, May 1998] © British Birds Ltd 1998

▲ 67. Female House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, Kent, November 1989 (*Richard Chandler*)

▲ 68. Female Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*, Israel, December 1994 (*Robin Chittenden*)

Female House Sparrow's paler stripes, though varying from rich buff to rufous and conspicuous against its black stripes, are comparatively unremarkable owing to their similarity in colour and tone to much of the remainder of the upperparts. The paler stripes, or braces, of female Spanish Sparrow vary from white to deep cream and, especially as they present a colour which is rare elsewhere on the upperparts and which is outlined in black, appear bolder and more contrasting, particularly against the plainer and greyer lower scapulars, than those of the more widespread species. Female House Sparrow only infrequently displays the strikingly white tips to the median coverts which are shown by most female Spanish Sparrows, and the pale fringes to its other wing-feathers, notably the tips to its greater coverts and the edges and tips to its tertials, are clearly more buff-toned and relatively less prominent. Only when in very worn plumage does female House Sparrow have its rump marked with the tiny, dark streaks which normally characterise the rump of female Spanish Sparrow.

Despite its long, contrasting supercilium, female House Sparrow looks comparatively plain-faced. Several features, not all of which are shown by all individuals, contribute to the better-marked head-pattern of female Spanish Sparrow. Its crown is usually faintly streaked darker; its supercilium is paler and more clean-cut; and the supercilium is frequently longer, extending, albeit less broadly, in front of the eye, where it shows to advantage adjacent to the normally darker, greyer lore. On average, the bill of Spanish Sparrow is a little longer and deeper-based than that of House Sparrow; this is a surprisingly obvious feature of stronger-billed individuals. Though varying with posture, the high point of the crown of Spanish Sparrow is usually closer to the nape and rather more peaked than the normally centrally positioned, rounded high point of House Sparrow's crown. The more distinct head-pattern of female Spanish Sparrow, together with its heavier bill and more aggressive-looking crown profile, gives the head and bill prominence, alongside the underparts and the upperparts, as a major identification character. In general, female

▲ 69. Female House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* × Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* ('Italian Sparrow' × *italiae*), Italy, April 1992 (*Richard Chandler*)

House Sparrow is richly coloured above, dull-toned below and fairly plain, while female Spanish Sparrow is paler and greyer above, paler below and more contrastingly marked both above and below.

Interbreeding takes place in many of the areas where the ranges of the two species overlap. Though such mixed breeding is normally uncommon, hybrids are locally abundant in some regions, notably in Northwest Africa. Hybrid females are individually inconsistent in appearance and display the full range of intermediate characters. Where hybrids are known to occur, or are suspected, the identification of a female sparrow should be approached with great caution. Apparently stabilised hybrid populations, × *italiae,* in southern and southeastern Europe, and × *maltae,* on some Mediterranean islands, also share the characters of House Sparrow and Spanish Sparrow, though their plumage is less variable than that of other hybrids. One such female hybrid × *italiae* is shown in plate 69. The upperparts of the females are quite rufous-toned, with buff braces, and strong contrast is confined to white tips to the median coverts. Thus, they most resemble the upperparts of female House Sparrow. The underparts of the females, though generally pale grey, are streaked and spotted darker, like those of female Spanish Sparrow. Also in common with female Spanish Sparrow, the females have lightly streaked crowns and dark grey lores, yet they possess unremarkable, diffuse, very pale brown supercilia which do not extend in front of the eyes, and thus are like those of female House Sparrow.

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NOTES

These contributions have all been assessed by the eight members of either the Behaviour Notes Panel or the Identification Notes Panel.

White Stork fishing from the air

At 12.00 hours on 21st May 1993, at the Brumovice reservoir, Opava District, Czech Republic, I saw a White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* flying above the water. As the reservoir is too deep for a stork to stand in, I was surprised when it dropped, with legs extended, as though about to land; but, rather than alighting, it caught a fish in its bill while its legs plunged about 20 cm beneath the surface. The stork immediately regained height, then landed on the waterside and swallowed the fish. The whole action took about 10 seconds. The fish was approximately 20 cm long, but it was not possible to determine the species. I have not seen similar behaviour by White Storks before or since.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT This behaviour is most unusual. Hancock, Kushlan & Kahl (1992, *Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills of the World*) stated that feeding while in flight has not been recorded for any species of stork, ibis or spoonbill (Ciconiidae and Threskiornithidae), although it is not uncommon among several species of heron (Ardeidae). Although storks can swim, they do so only rarely (e.g. *Orn. Beob.* 52: 60-62). Since the White Stork locates its food mostly by sight, it seems possible that the individual at Brumovice reservoir, while coming in to land beside the water, happened to notice the fish just beneath the surface and made a successful grab for it.

Female *Aythya* hybrid resembling Lesser Scaup

On 6th October 1996, at Eyebrook Reservoir, Leicestershire, Steve Lister drew my attention to a female *Aythya* duck which he considered to be a hybrid of the 'Greater Scaup *A. marila* type'. Although I was inclined to agree with this identification, the duck was sufficiently similar to a female Lesser Scaup *A. affinis,* particularly in its bill pattern, to warrant closer study. Along with John Wright, who made the drawings (fig. 1, on page 196), I watched the bird for the next hour or more at ranges down to about 50 m. On 17th October, I saw what was presumably the same bird at nearby Rutland Water.

Several aspects of this duck's appearance seem worthy of note. Its size, structure and general appearance were similar to those of Lesser Scaup; when viewed head-on, the crown looked quite broad and flattish, as is normal for both scaups (Tufted Ducks *A. fuligula* appear to have a narrower, more 'pointed' crown); the bill pattern was apparently identical to that of Lesser Scaup, with black restricted to the nail, which was quite small and narrow (I had previously believed this to be diagnostic of Lesser Scaup); and, in flight, it revealed a wing pattern similar to that of Tufted Duck. It would seem, therefore, to have been a hybrid, presumably between Tufted Duck and one of the scaups. The short rear-crown 'tuft' and the whitish undertail-coverts were

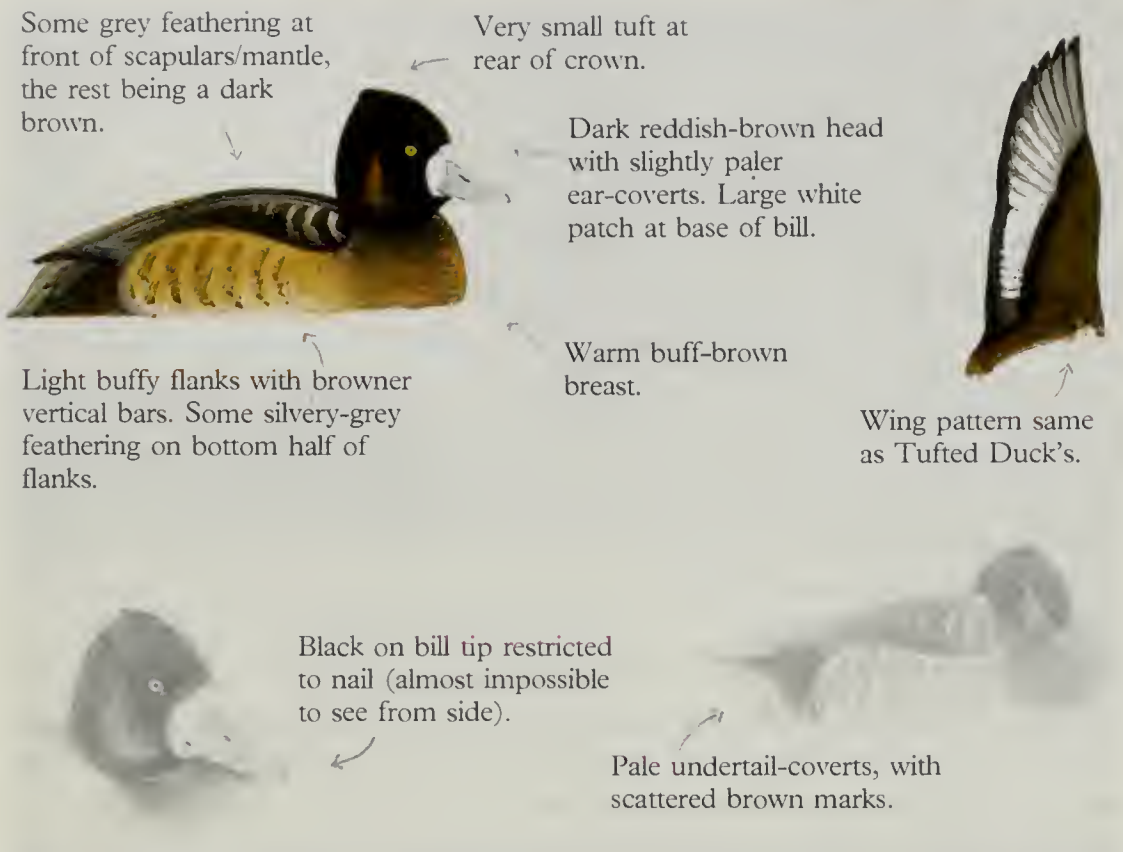

Fig. 1. Hybrid *Aythya* duck resembling female Lesser Scaup *A. affinis*, Eyebrook Reservoir, Leicestershire, 6th October 1996 (*John Wright*)

not quite right for Lesser Scaup, which has a small hindcrown/nape 'bump' and the white on the undertail-coverts more restricted and often obscured. These features, however, were relatively subtle, and, arguably, only the wing pattern indicated a hybrid origin. Lesser Scaup has a rather narrow white band on the secondaries, this becoming grey on the inner primaries, whereas this individual had a broader band, with white continuing across the inner primaries.

Female Lesser Scaups are now being reported in Britain. Presumably, some Lesser Scaup hybrids may show a wing pattern identical to that of 'pure' individuals; if so, observers will need to be exceptionally careful.

A. H. J. Harrop
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EDITORIAL COMMENT Peter Lansdown has commented: 'I agree that the bird was a hybrid. One parent must have been a Tufted Duck because of the small tuft and the extent of the pale undertail-coverts. Tufted Duck parentage could account for the wing pattern and the white at the base of the bill, so there is not necessarily any Greater Scaup or scaup influence respectively in these features. John Wright noted the head as being "dark reddish-brown", which suggests that the other parent may have been a Common Pochard *A. ferina*, but Andrew Harrop (*in litt.*) states that the head was "dark brown" without reddish and the irides were "golden yellow", and these features, together with the lack of a dusky area at the base of the bill and the tiny amount of black at the bill tip, do not confirm this. Indeed, the bill pattern strongly indicates a

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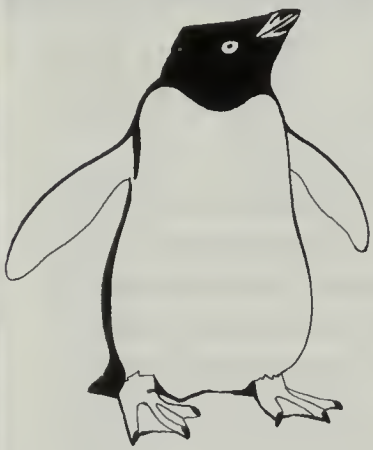

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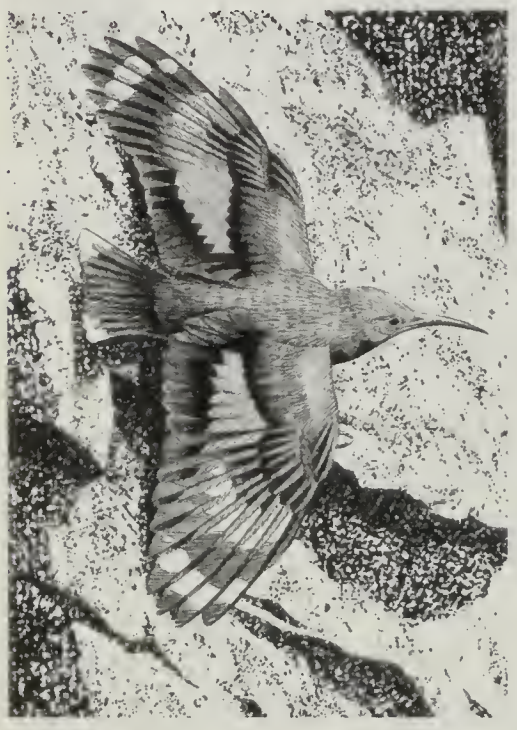

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scaup parentage, as do the slightly paler ear-coverts. Steve Madge (in Madge & Burn, 1988, *Wildfowl*, p. 244) stated that "Female-type hybrids . . . are generally impossible to identify with any degree of certainty . . . Identifying the hybrid parentage is normally impossible under field conditions . . .". Keith Vinicombe (in Harris *et al.*, 1989, *The Macmillan Field Guide to Bird Identification*, p. 43) stated "In most cases an educated guess at a hybrid's parentage can be made: many are more or less 'half-and-half', some show distinct characters of one parent but not the other, but a few resemble a different species altogether." '

Roosting behaviour of Peregrine Falcons

Along both sides of the huge shipyard building at which I work, on the coast at Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, there are several recesses about 43 m up, near the roof, which house warning lights for aircraft using the local airfield. Since at least 1990, two of these have been used regularly in autumn and winter as feeding stations and roost sites by a pair of Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus*. The two falcons have not been seen together in one recess, one favouring the northwest end of the building and the other using the end recess on the opposite side of the building. In wet weather, these sites appear to be particularly favoured, providing a safe niche where the birds remain completely dry. At such times, they roost on the lantern bracket in the rear corner of the recess (fig. 1, position a).

During winter, I leave work at about 17.00 GMT; the Peregrines have always been absent at this time. In early December 1992, however, I had occasion to return to work three times at 21.00 hours and found one of the falcons in the

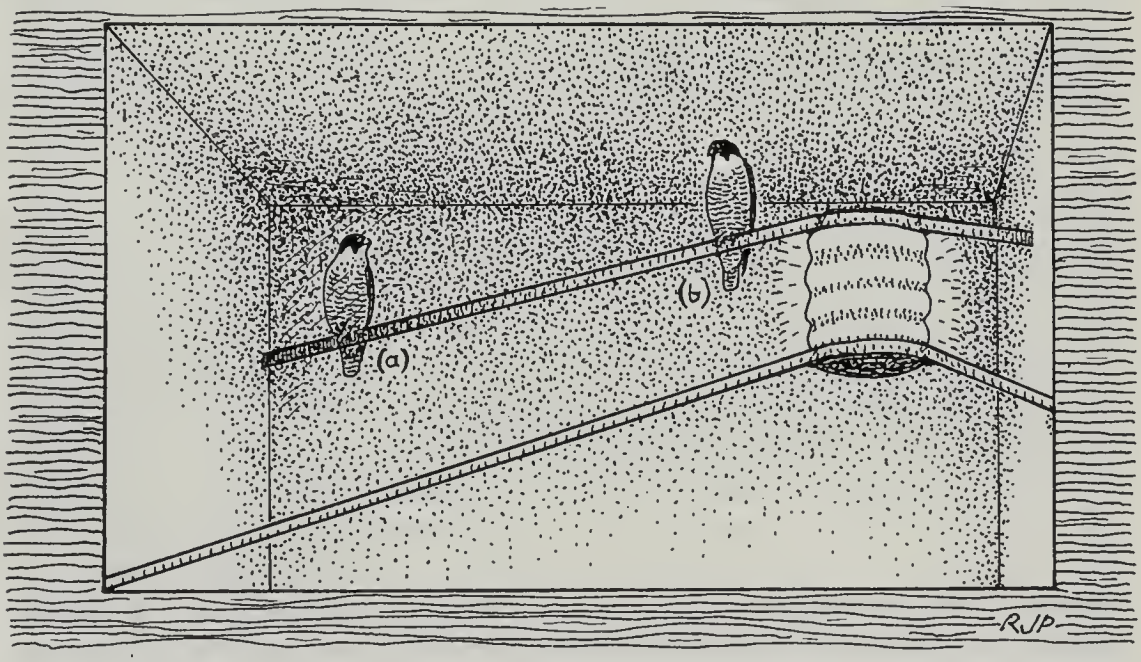

Fig. 1. Alternative daytime (a) and night-time (b) roosting positions of Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* on lantern bracket in recess housing aircraft warning lanterns, about 43 m above ground level, in side of shipyard building, Cumbria (*redrawn by R. J. Prytherch from sketch by Jeff A. Davies*). Note that falcon roosts closer to the lantern at night. Recess is approx. 2m deep × 2m high × 3m wide. The centre line of the lantern is level with the outside wall.

northwest recess. This observation is, I believe, quite significant in two respects: first, the falcon had arrived at its roost after darkness; and, secondly, it had chosen to perch close to the glowing lantern, from which it would have the benefit of some heat (fig. 1, position b).

On my daily rounds of work, I always check to see if the falcons are present and to observe the remains of their avian prey: mostly Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Common Teal *Anas crecca* and pigeons (Columbidae).

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Long-distance vagrancy of Ptarmigan

On 16th January 1987, at Foros Cape, near Burgas, on the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria, along with Dr T. Michev, L. Protirov, V. Pomakov and K. Njagolov, we saw a grouse *Lagopus* being pursued in flight by a dozen Yellow-legged Gulls *Larus cachinnans*. As the group flew over us and towards the sea, the grouse turned back; we noted its white remiges, variegated dark-and-white upperparts indicating active moult, and red comb. It was almost certainly a Ptarmigan *L. mutus*.

At 14.50 hours on 31st December 1996, at Atanasovsko Lake, near Burgas, we saw an adult female Ptarmigan in moult to winter plumage, accompanied by an injured White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*, at distances down to about 10 m. We failed to find it again on the following two days.

The Ptarmigan's nearest breeding area is in the extreme northwest of the Balkan Peninsula, about 1,100 km away. The longest movement previously recorded for this species concerned an individual which covered 'over 1,000 km' in Greenland (*BWP* vol. 2).

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Whimbrels thermalling

The note on Eurasian Curlews *Numenius arquata* thermalling in Cornwall in April 1991 (*Brit. Birds* 86: 314) recalled a similar instance involving Whimbrels *N. phaeopus* near Cape St Vincent, Algarve, Portugal. At 16.30 hours on 29th April 1990, in calm, warm weather with some light low cloud, I was walking about 2 km inland and 4 km east of the Cape when I heard Whimbrels calling. Almost directly above me, I saw a flight of 50-60 Whimbrels wheeling in a circle some 50 m in diameter; the circle moved in a clockwise direction for several minutes, before breaking up as each individual left and disappeared upwards into the low cloud. This ability to make use of thermals presumably enhances migratory efficiency, and may be particularly significant for birds that have just made a long sea crossing (Africa is 400 km south of Cape St Vincent); finding thermals is likely to be facilitated if individual birds remain in visual or auditory communication with each other during the migratory journey.

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Lesser Black-backed Gull apparently picking up and dropping live Stoat

At 11.50 GMT on 1st May 1993, from a hide at South Walney Nature Reserve, Cumbria, we noticed a commotion among Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* nesting in a nearby area of short grass surrounded by dense nettles *Urtica*. Two gulls were diving from about 2-3 m at something on the ground. This turned out to be a Stoat *Mustela erminea*, which suddenly ran from a nettle patch to a gull nest, where one of the gulls swooped on the mammal and struck it with its feet, before lifting it to a height of 1 m or so and dropping it; the Stoat then escaped into the nettles. On inspecting the nest, we found that it contained one egg. Dive-bombing by gulls is an effective anti-predator strategy; being apparently picked up and dropped must be especially intimidating to a small predator.

Geoff Hosey and Marie Jacques
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EDITORIAL COMMENT Derek Goodwin has commented: 'If this is, as I think, the first record of *anything* being picked up by *any* gull with its feet, then it is clearly amazing. But I believe that the Stoat must have responded to being struck by biting or clinging to the gull's foot, and was then momentarily lifted a couple of metres.' Geoff Hosey (*in litt.*) has responded that 'Yes, this is quite possible.' Nevertheless, this is an interesting observation, and the gulls' actions successfully interrupted the Stoat's predatory activities.

Kittiwakes and Great Crested Grebes 'flycatching'

The note on Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis* catching flies (*Brit. Birds* 87: 88) reminded me of similar behaviour which I have observed from other species. In the second and third weeks of April in 1981 and 1982, at Farmoor Reservoir, Oxfordshire, groups of 29-42 Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* and up to 60 Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* gathered to feed on rising chironomids. Both species caught these insects by snatching them out of the air, usually after a quick dash, but sometimes without moving forwards; unlike the Little Grebes, their bodies only occasionally just cleared the surface. At the same time, 150-200 Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus*, rather than using the same feeding method, were hawking the flies over the water.

John Brucker
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EDITORIAL COMMENT *BWP* (vol. 3) does not mention anything of this sort for Kittiwake, although such behaviour is not unusual for Great Crested Grebe. Dr K. E. L. Simmons has commented: 'In my 1977 paper on the maintenance activities and routine of Great Crested Grebes (*Bristol Ornithology* 10: 175-196), I termed this behaviour "snatching", whereby the birds reach up and snap at gnats, etc. (see also *Brit. Birds* 44: 391); I have never, however, seen one clear the surface to do this.'

Collared Doves feeding from fresh Rabbit carcase

At 08.30 GMT on 10th December 1993, near Kingston St Mary, Somerset, I saw three Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* feeding from the fresh, squashed carcase of a Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* on a road. From my stationary car, I watched them extract and swallow small pieces of flesh for about two minutes until, owing to approaching traffic, I had to move off, causing the doves to fly away. The Collared Doves could, of course, have been taking vegetable food items from the Rabbit's ruptured intestinal tract, as well as flesh from the body, but I saw no evidence of this.

According to *BWP* (vol. 4), Collared Doves commonly feed on cereal grains, seeds and fruit, grasses, invertebrates (including beetles, aphids and lepidopteran larvae) and bread, but there is no mention of their feeding from a mammal carcase.

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Crossways Cottage, West Bagborough, Taunton, Somerset TA4 3EG

EDITORIAL COMMENT Derek Goodwin has commented: 'This is most interesting and, I think, a new observation; though I do not find it overly surprising if the crushing effect of the cars were such that the flesh was broken up or pulverised, so that the weak bill of the Collared Doves could detach bits of a size they could swallow. In London (and no doubt elsewhere), many domesticated Rock Doves *Columba livia* eagerly take cooked (perhaps also raw?) meat with great eagerness, though, unless it has been cut up into small bits or is in such form as rissoles or sausage, they often fail to detach suitably sized pieces. In Australia, the Spice Finch *Lonchura punctulata*, otherwise a seed-eater which locally also takes bread, etc., has been recorded feeding on meat from small vertebrates crushed by road traffic (see, e.g., Klaus Immelman, 1965, *Australian Finches in Bush and Aviary*, pages 161-162).'

Savi's Warbler imitating Bearded Tit and Water Rail

On 29th April 1992, Pat and Ray Crockson and I visited a small marsh near Mikulov, South Moravia, Czech Republic. After several minutes we heard the typical nasal twanging call of a Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*, but did not see the bird itself. A Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* then flew over the reedbed, landed, and sang four typical Bearded Tit phrases before starting to give the typical song of Savi's Warbler. We saw and heard this on several occasions, on each of which the warbler sang in the same way: four verses of Bearded Tit (indeed, indistinguishable from that species' song) followed by its own normal song. At least four singing male Savi's Warblers were present at this locality, but this mimicry was heard only from this one individual. Furthermore, we twice heard this same male imitate a Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus,* this again being easily taken for the characteristic pig-like grunting call of that species.

Both Bearded Tit and Water Rail are quite common at this locality. The observation was made several days after the normal arrival time of Savi's Warbler in the region. I visited the site one week later, when I saw and

heard all three species, but no mimicry from any Savi's Warblers.

I have found no record of Savi's Warbler mimicking other bird species in this way.

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Biosphere Reserve Pálava, Náměstí 32, 692 01 Mikulov, Czech Republic

Wintering Blackcaps taking nectar from, and probably pollinating, *Mahonia*

At Stapleford, Cambridge, the gardens on either side of my own each have a *Mahonia japonica* bush. Between 10th February and 7th March 1993, a male Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* was seen feeding on the flowers of these bushes; in the following winter, a male was again seen at these flowers from 30th December to 27th February 1994, and a female Blackcap almost daily from 30th January until 16th March. Both warblers fed on the nectar in the blossoms in an identical manner, working their way along the racemes, sometimes hanging upside-down, and turning the head this way and that in order to insert the bill most carefully and delicately deep inside the blooms. Feeding sessions were timed at anything up to half-an-hour, and were often followed by a bout of bill-wiping in an adjacent Holly *Ilex aquifolium* or apple tree *Malus*. The flowers appeared to be quite undamaged. As the birds' bills were covered in bright yellow pollen after feeding, I feel sure that some pollination must have occurred. Blue Tits *Parus caeruleus* sometimes fed on these same flowers, but in a most destructive fashion, tearing off the petals. If a Blackcap was present, however, it quickly chased off the tit.

During these periods, I saw the Blackcaps take other food only once, on 11th February, when the female pecked briefly at apples on my lawn. In February 1994, I learned of two other *Mahonia japonica* bushes in the village which were being visited by Blackcaps, possibly the same individuals.

Blackcaps returned to the *Mahonia* bushes in the following two winters, but on these occasions they also varied their diet with apples and bread. In winter 1996/97, however, cold weather delayed the blossoming of the *Mahonia* until late January, by which time the Blackcaps, which had hitherto fed on Holly berries and apples, had left.

BWP (vol. 6) lists various nectar flowers used by Blackcaps, including Winter Jasmine *Jasminium nudiflorum*, but not *Mahonia*; although the three gardens in the village all had flowering jasmine and other bushes, only the *Mahonia japonica* were seen to be exploited.

Brian Harrup
49 Priam's Way, Stapleford, Cambridge CB2 5DT

Blue Tits nesting in standard bat-box with fatal results

As licensed bird-ringers and bat-workers, we organise nestbox schemes for birds and bats. On 15th July 1993, while examining a standard bat-box, we found a dead brood of six almost fully fledged Blue Tits *Parus caeruleus*. It would appear that the adult tits had entered the box through the slot at the

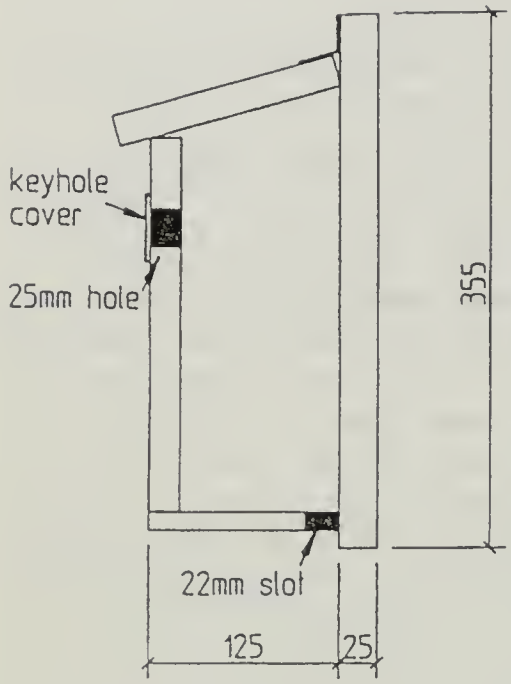

Fig. 1. Standard bat-box.

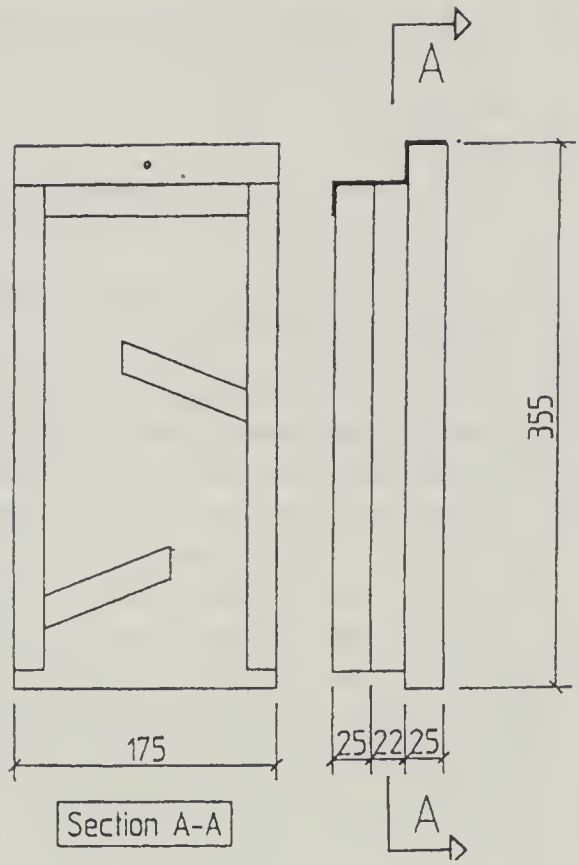

Fig. 2. Warwickshire bat-box.

bottom, built a nest and hatched young; as the young approached fledging age, their trampling had flattened the nest across the entrance slot and, just before fledging, the nest had completely blocked the entrance, preventing the adults from entering; the young were trapped inside and subsequently starved to death. Reflecting on this incident prompted us to examine, on 7th November 1993, a further five standard-type bat-boxes attached to isolated Pedunculate Oaks *Quercus robur* in a 30-year-old plantation of Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*. Three of these contained old nests, presumably of Blue Tits, of which two appeared (from the presence of feather scale) to have been successful; the third box contained an incomplete nest. Thus, these bat-boxes could represent a common hazard for tits which use them. We suggest two remedies:

1. In all bat-boxes, bore a 25-mm hole in the position of the conventional nestbox hole, but close this with a keyhole-type cover (fig. 1); inspect the boxes in April and, if birds are using them, remove the hole cover to allow access above the nest; after fledging, remove the nest, re-cover the access hole, and allow bats to use the box during July-September.

2. Use the 'Warwickshire-type' bat-boxes (fig. 2) designed by M. W. Finnemore (an original member of the Warwickshire Bat Group); while these have been used with great success by bats, they are of insufficient volume to be attractive to Blue Tits as nesting sites.

George Yates and John Matthews
24 Shelbourne Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 9JP

NEWS AND COMMENT

Compiled by Wendy Dickson and Bob Scott
Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'

The death of ornithology

Under this depressing title, and with the subsidiary title 'Where have all the young ornithologists gone?', Sören Svensson has demonstrated that, in Sweden, the vast majority of participants in bird-monitoring projects, both now and 20 years ago, were born during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, with their average age increasing from 30 years in 1975 to over 50 years in 1996. Similarly, although total membership of the Swedish Ornithological Society (Sveriges Ornitologiska Förening) has increased during this same period, the number of members aged under 22 has declined, from 1,000 to 500 (from 15% to 5%). He asks whether this is an international trend, and suggests that, if so, it has very serious implications, since, as well as losing volunteers for nature protection and monitoring, there will be an inevitable loss of the population base for moulding public opinion in favour of nature protection. The full details are in *Ornis Svecica* (7: 175-179). Would analysis of BTO membership provide equally depressing reading?

Local Nature Reserves

January saw the publication of a review and recommendations by the Urban Forum of the UK Man and the Biosphere Committee entitled *Local Nature Reserves—a time for reflection: a time for new action.* Its findings show that the powers which local authorities have had since 1949 to set up Local Nature Reserves remain under-used, despite the fact that they do not require major resources, have educational benefits, are enjoyed and supported by local people, and protect locally valuable natural assets.

The number of Local Nature Reserves in Great Britain increased from 76 in 1980 to 549 in 1995, but the average size fell over the same period from 43 ha to 27 ha. Small reserves generally cost more per unit area to manage and play a less useful part in conserving local biodiversity.

In underlining the importance of community involvement in Local Nature Reserves, Urban Forum points out that the people who use reserves are often not able to contribute to planning and managing them. Since many reserves are used a lot by schools, the Urban Forum suggests the formation of Junior Management Boards, made up of pupils from local schools.

The 50 recommendations in the review are directed not only at local authorities, but also at nature conservation agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations, Government Departments and all those involved in selecting, acquiring, declaring and managing Local Nature Reserves.

For further information, contact Urban Forum Secretary, Chris Gordon, on 01522 544400.

Photographs of 1997 rarities needed

Colour prints, black-and-white prints and colour transparencies are needed to illustrate the Rarities Committee's next report. We rely on readers' help, so that we can include the best possible selection. Those published (as well as those circulated to the Rarities Committee) are eligible for The Carl Zeiss Award (see page 170). Please send prints or slides (as soon as possible) to Mrs Sheila Cobban, British Birds, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ.

Swift response

Norwich City Council is thought to be the first local authority to fit custom-made nestboxes for Common Swifts *Apus apus* in the roof spaces of its properties. Of 19,500 rented homes in its area (36% of all properties in the city), around one-third were built before the Second World War and are now in need of major refurbishment, including roofing work; when this is carried out, the boxes will be put in place. With an agreed budget for 1997/98 of £8,000, it is hoped to provide two boxes in each of about 200 homes. The policy will, however, continue indefinitely, and the Council is actively seeking sponsorship, for which early support has come from Sandtoft Roof Tiles Ltd.

While the problem was highlighted by the BTO and the RSPB, which jointly launched the 'Concern for Swifts Campaign' in 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 89: 474), perhaps the most heartening aspect is that Norwich City Council was first alerted to the needs of the swifts by the tenants themselves, who enjoyed seeing the birds returning to their roof spaces and were worried that roof refurbishment would prevent that access for them in future years. Well done, the tenants, and Norwich City Council!

Displaced Kittiwake rehousing

Inland breeding of Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* along the River Tyne was first noted in 1963, and the following year there were three nests on the huge Baltic Flour Mill in Gateshead. By 1972, this colony numbered 17 nests, and in 1997 had grown to about 250. Smaller colonies became established along both banks of the river, although some of these were on old warehouses which have been redeveloped. An Arts Lottery Award has recently been made to Gateshead Council to convert the Flour Mill into a contemporary arts museum. This will result in the removal of the Kittiwakes from their ledge, so Durham Bird Club has been advising the Council on an alternative nesting structure. Planning permission has now been given for a 16-m-high tower on top of which there will be a series of ledges constructed in heavy-section timber. These should accommodate up to 200 nest sites, and it is intended that the tower will be available before the 1998 breeding season. The success of this innovative design will be closely monitored, as it could provide a model for displaced birds in other development sites. (*Contributed by Tony Armstrong*)

Norway's Fair Isle

With White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*, Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*, Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*, Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*, Pallas's Leaf Warbler *P. proregulus*, Radde's Warbler *P. schwarzi*, Dusky Warbler *P. fuscatus*, Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*, Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*, Northern Parula *Parula americana* and Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*, the Norwegian island of Utsira has 'many of the same qualities as Fair Isle'. The bird observatory's fourth annual report, covering 1996, includes English summaries, and is available for £10 (incl. p&p).

Utsira lies 17 km off Karmoy, just south of the city of Haugesund in southwest Norway. 'If you are tempted to visit the island, the personnel of Utsira Bird Observatory is more than pleased to help you to organize the trip.' The address is Utsira Fuglestasjon, Postboks 23, 5515 Utsira, Norway.

Norfolk Night Herons

Up to 30 Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* of the nominate European race breed within a large aviary at Great Witchingham. An unknown number escaped in the Great Gale of October 1987, and others are said to have escaped on other occasions through visitors' carelessness. 'Additionally, up to 30 un-marked birds are also free, with small numbers nesting in the Grey Heron colony within the park boundary. These birds are all free-flying, yet the Park owner feels that they are virtually sedentary, and those that do roam never wander far . . . up to eight birds have been seen to fly out of the Park to feed in the Wensum valley at dusk (maximum six so far in 1997).' Despite this contention, consideration of all reports of Night Herons in East Anglia needs to take this feral breeding colony into account. The full details are in *Norfolk Bird Club Bulletin* (27: 11-12).

Membership of the NBC is £8.50 p.a.; write to Bill Landells, North Haven, Marks Lane, Santon Downham, Brandon, Suffolk IP27 0TG.

Brasher sponsors YOY

We are delighted to announce that *The Brasher Boot Company* has become one of the co-sponsors of the Young Ornithologist of the Year competition. For each of the three winners, *The Brasher Boot Company* will donate one of its rustle-free waterproof 'Avocet' jackets, specially designed for birdwatchers and endorsed by the RSPB. For a free copy of *The Brasher Boot Company*'s catalogue, contact The Brasher Boot Company Ltd, White Cross, Lancaster LA1 4XY; tel. 01524 841000; fax 01524 848222.

Award for RSPB research biologist

We were pleased to note that Dr Rhys Green, Principal Research Biologist with the RSPB in Scotland, has been awarded the prestigious Zoological Society of London's 1997 Marsh Award for Conservation, for 'excellent research on practical issues in bird conservation'. Over the years, Rhys has contributed to the conservation of a wide range of threatened British species, including Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Corn Crake *Crex crex* and Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, and made a major contribution towards the management of RSPB reserves with his work on Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and a range of other wetland species. Those of us who have worked with him loudly applaud the award.

Congratulations, LPO!

We have offered our congratulations to the RSPB for passing the one-million-member mark, but we all knew that the magic number would be reached. Perhaps it is even more important that we offer our congratulations to *Ligue Française pour la Protection des Oiseaux* (LPO) for passing the 25,000-member mark at the end of 1997. Other highlights recorded by the LPO in 1997 included the first successful nesting of Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* in Brittany for more than 30 years; and the first young Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* fledged from the re-establishment programme in the Alps. Reserve management on the slowly but steadily growing network of LPO reserves is also producing results. Since its creation in 1985, the number of wintering waterfowl at the Moëze-Oléron Reserve in Charente-Maritime has increased four-fold to nearly 80,000 birds, including some 30,000 Dunlins *Calidris alpina*.

For more details about the LPO, its activities and publications, please contact Ken Hall, LPO (UK), The Anchorage, The Chalks, Chew Magna, Bristol BS40 8SN.

Evolution in action

Look under L for 'Lark' in the index of most field guides and you will find 'Lark, Crested' and 'Lark, Horned' (or 'Lark, Shore'), but you will need to *know* to look under S for 'Skylark' and under W for 'Woodlark'. That is fine for us, but a nightmare for the layperson or general biologist or even for ornithologists from other continents. The BOU and *BB* have tried to eradicate inconsistencies (e.g. by listing Gyrfalcon, Corncrake and Woodpigeon as Gyr Falcon, Corn Crake and Wood Pigeon) and to reverse this trend of amalgamation, in the interests of common-sense usability.

Are the BOU and *BB*, however, ornithological equivalents of King Canute? We see in the latest *BBC Wildlife* (vol. 16, no. 2, page 63) that *Parus caeruleus* is three times (so it is not a printer's slip) referred to as Bluetit. Should this trend be resisted?

The natural evolution of the English language is fascinating, unpredictable and mysterious; those who try to influence its course are usually unsuccessful (see Bill Bryson, 1990, *Mother Tongue: the English language*), but the purpose of English bird names is to aid understanding, not only among ornithologists but also between people with little or no ornithological knowledge. Do we have a *duty* to try to maintain simplicity and non-elitist names?

'Bluetits' apart, *BBC Wildlife* consistently maintains its high standards; every issue is filled with eminently readable articles and snippets. The current subscription price is UK £30, Europe £34.95, rest of the World £37.50; write to PO Box 425, Woking, Surrey GU21 1GP.

Suppression! Why?

We quote from the Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society's *Newsletter* columnist 'Jack Snipe', concerning the Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* trapped and ringed 'at a private site in the north of the County' on 19th October 1997, which 'brought a sad and predictable chorus of "suppression!" from some quarters. "Where was it?", "Who saw it?" and "Why didn't they tell anyone?" they cried in self-righteous indignation . . . Rather than arrogantly assume that their motives must have been selfish, why not stop and *think* for a moment (or even longer if possible)? For a start, the bird was at a *private* site, not owned by the ringers, which means that, even leaving aside any other considerations, the owner has an inalienable right not to have his land invaded and trampled by hordes of rabid monomaniacs. A Red-flanked Bluetail in the Midlands would attract *hundreds* of twitchers, all of whom would travel by car. Cars need space in which to park, and twitchers need space to stand in while they wait for a glimpse of a skulking Bluetail in the undergrowth. Then there is the matter of public liability: under certain circumstances, a landowner may be legally liable for any injury suffered by a member of the public while on his land. Ever stopped to think about that one?!

'Let's respect the finders' decision not to release the news (which was no doubt made only after considering all the implications) rather than immediately condemning them and branding them as suppressors before knowing all the facts.'

The Membership Secretary of the LROS is K. J. Goodrich, 6 Riverside Close, Birstall, Leicester LE4 4EH.

Major declines on North Staffs. Moors

In 1985, 1992 and 1996, the RSPB and English Nature undertook breeding-bird surveys on the North Staffordshire Moors. The comparative results, published in the *West Midland Bird Club Bulletin* (no. 389), make for very depressing reading. The following figures refer to the number of breeding pairs recorded in each of the three years:

Species	1985	1992	1996
Merlin *Falco columbarius*	1	3	3
Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*	100	88	101
Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix*	5	4	3
Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*	306	128	85
European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*	12	4	1
Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*	421	280	173
Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*	654	320	178
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*	5	0	0
Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*	19	14	19
Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*	0	2	2
Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*	51	41	52
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*	57	94	69
Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*	95	88	64
Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*	47	67	33

While it is easy to speculate from these figures, it would be wiser and safer to await the final publication of the full report. We, however, may not be wise, and we are inclined to speculate in this column on the reasons for declines. How about increased agricultural activity that will no doubt include serious over-grazing?

Further details of the West Midland Bird Club from 74 Ivyfield Road, Erdington, Birmingham B23 7HH.

BOT ten years old

This is the tenth-anniversary year of the *Barn Owl Trust*. It hopes to make 1998 a great year for the Barn Owl *Tyto alba*. More information from The Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU.

Fresh faces on Fair Isle

Fair Isle Bird Observatory has a new Warden, Paul Baker, new Administrator, Helen Baker, new Assistant Warden, Charlie Holt, and new Seabird Monitoring Officer, Jim Vaughan.

For bookings at FIBO, contact Helen Baker on 01595-760258 or e-mail fairisle.birdobs@zetnet.co.uk

Counting at the Strait of Gibraltar

The Strait of Gibraltar (southern tip of Cádiz province, Andalucía, Spain) is the most important 'bottle-neck' for west European migratory birds that cross the Mediterranean Sea, being only 14 km wide. Raptors and storks concentrate in thousands in autumn at Tarifa while waiting for suitable winds for their crossing to Africa.

The Regional Government of Andalucía (Consejería de Medio Ambiente, Junta de Andalucía) is promoting and funding a five-year project to monitor the autumn migration of soaring birds, which will be co-ordinated by the Spanish partner of BirdLife International (Sociedad Española de Ornitología).

Experienced volunteers are needed to help with fieldwork for periods of at least 12 days from mid July to late October. Food and accommodation will be provided by the Junta de Andalucía.

All volunteers should indicate their preferred dates and (except those who participated in 1997) supply a brief CV. To register and for further information please write to: Programa MIGRES, Sociedad Española de Ornitología, Crta. de Húmera 63-1, E-28224 Pozuelo (Madrid), Spain; phone: +34 1 351 10 45 and +34 908 82 04 95; fax: +34 1 351 13 86; e-mail: seo@quercus.es

'Birds of Belgium'

A 36-page checklist of the *Birds of Belgium 1901-1995* has just been published. Flemish, scientific and French names are given, actual records for major rarities and coded summary for the others (e.g. M = record of a new species/subspecies published or unpublished; NA = record not accepted by Rare Birds Committee; NB = collected specimen lost), with categorisation (A-E) similar to that of the BOU, and estimates of the number of breeding pairs (e.g. 650-1,000 Barn Owls *Tyto alba*, 20-25 Eagle Owls *Bubo bubo*).

The list is available for £3 (send International Mail Coupons) from Paul Herroelen, Leuvensesteenweg 347, B-3370 Boutersen, Belgium.

Moroccan records

White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina*, Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*, Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*, Barbary Falcons *Falco pelegrinoides*, all three *Porzana* crakes, Senegal Thick-knee *Burhinus senegalensis*, Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*, Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*, Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*, Isabelline Wheatears *Oenanthe isabellina* and Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*.

All seen by birders visiting Morocco in 1997. But the observers responsible have (so far) failed to supply details to the Moroccan Rare Birds Committee, which appeals to *all* observers visiting the country to send in details of their observations, to Comité d'Homologation du Maroc, c/o Prof. Jacques Franchimont (secrétariat), Quartier Abbas Lmsahdi, rue n° 6, n° 22, V.N.50.000 Meknes, Morocco.

New Recorder

Tim Dean, Echna View, Burray, Orkney KW17 2SX, has taken over from C. J. Booth as Recorder for Orkney.

LOOKING BACK

Twenty-five years ago: 'One of the most amazing events of the month [May 1973] was an influx of Red-footed Falcons *Falco vespertinus* from continental Europe from about 20th, continuing through June.

'Although this insectivorous falcon has been an expected spring and early summer vagrant for many years, this influx was on an entirely new scale (both numerically and geographically). About 40 birds in 24 counties completely eclipses the previous record numbers of 1959, 1961, 1967 and 1969.' (*Brit. Birds* 66: 369; 67: 318-319)

RECENT BBRC DECISIONS

ZEISS

This monthly listing of the most-recent decisions by the British Birds Rarities Committee is not intended to be comprehensive or in any way to replace the annual 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain'. The records listed are mostly those of the rarest species, or those of special interest for other reasons. All records refer to 1997 unless stated otherwise.

ACCEPTED: **Pied-billed Grebe** *Podilymbus podiceps* South Norwood Lake (Greater London), 26th January to 30th March; presumed same, Tooting Bec Common (Greater London), 5th December to at least 31st January 1998. **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis* Strumble Head (Pembrokeshire), 12th September. **Wilson's Storm-petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus* Strumble Head, 6th September. **White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* Burnham Overy area (Norfolk), 28th October. **Black-winged Pratincole** *Glareola nordmanni* Martin Mere (Lancashire), 22nd August to at least 18th September. **Semipalmated Plover** *Charadrius semipalmatus* Dawlish Warren (Devon), mid April to 21st September. **Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla* Deerness (Orkney), 25th July. **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *C. acuminata* Long Drag (Cleveland), 26th August. **Stilt Sandpiper** *Micropalama himantopus* Minsmere (Suffolk), 7th-13th September. **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularia* Long Drag, 16th-29th September. **Wilson's Phalarope** *Phalaropus tricolor* Beacon Ponds, Kilnsea (East Yorkshire), 2nd September. **Bonaparte's Gull** *Larus philadelphia* Drift Reservoir (Cornwall), 12th February; Kingsbarns Beach (Fife), 18th August to at least 12th September. **Gull-billed Tern** *Sterna nilotica* Two, Landguard (Suffolk), 1st May. **Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* Bardsey (Caernarfonshire), 20th-21st September; Skokholm (Pembrokeshire), 24th-26th September. **Desert Wheatear** *O. deserti* Skokholm, 12th December. **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Holkham Meals (Norfolk), 20th-21st October.

M. J. Rogers, Secretary, BBRC, 2 Churchtown Cottages, Towednack, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3AZ

RECENT REPORTS

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan

This summary covers the period from 16th March to 5th April 1998. These are unchecked reports, not authenticated records.

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* Dawlish Warren (Devon), 31st March to 5th April. **Eurasian Scops Owl** *Otus scops* Freshly dead, Brownstown Mead (Co. Waterford), 5th April. **Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti* Folkestone (Kent), 28th March; Flamborough Head (Humberside), 5th April. **Short-toed Treecreeper** *Certhia brachydactyla* Dungeness (Kent), 30th-31st March.

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ZAMBIA - South Luangwa National Park.
27 Mar - 5 Apr 98; 6 - 15 Nov 98;
12 - 21 Feb 99; 26 Mar - 4 Apr 99.

NAMIBIA - Swakopmund & Walvis Bay, Spitskoppe, Etosha & Waterberg Mountains.
21 - 30 Jan 99; 11 - 20 Feb 99; 25 Feb - 6 Mar 99.

MALAWI - Lake Malawi, Zomba Plateau & Liwonde National Park.
16 - 25 Mar 98; 15 - 24 Feb 99; 15 - 24 Mar 99.

SOUTHERN MOROCCO - The desert, Oued Massa, Oued Sous & Marrakech.
10 - 19 Apr 98; 12 - 21 Feb 99;
26 Feb - 7 Mar 99; 9 - 18 Apr 99.

ETHIOPIA - Addis, Gafersa, Awash National Park, Wondo Guenet & Rift Valley Lakes.
10 - 19 Apr 98; 20 - 29 Nov 98;
12 - 21 Feb 99; 9 - 18 Apr 99.

ETHIOPIAN ENDEMICS - Debre Libanos, Solulta, Ankober, Lakes, Wondo Guenet & Bale Mountains.
10 - 19 Apr 98; 27 Nov - 6 Dec 98;
19 - 28 Feb 99; 9 - 18 Apr 99.

INDIA - Delhi, Ranthambore & Bharatpur.
10 - 18 Apr 98; 20 - 28 Nov 98;
12 - 20 Feb 99; 9 - 17 Apr 99.

KAZAKHSTAN - Deserts, steppes & Tien Shan Mountains; plus Relict Gull extension.
14 - 22 May 98; 21 - 29 May 98. Similar dates 99.

NEPAL - Chitwan, Kosi & Kathmandu Valley.
Departures every Friday throughout Jan & Feb 99;
8 - 17 May 98; 7 - 16 May 99.

NEPAL - THE TRAGOPAN TREK
A 10-day tour including Langtang Valley trek.
1 - 10 May 98; 15 - 24 May 98. Similar dates 99.

TANZANIA - Saadani Game Reserve, and the Usambara and Uluguru Mountains.
23 Oct - 1 Nov 98; 12 - 21 Feb 99.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
29 Mar - 5 Apr 98; 5 - 12 Apr 98;
18 - 25 Oct 98. Similar dates 99.

NEW ENGLAND - USA
Spring migration on the Massachusetts coast.
17 - 26 May 98; 16 - 25 May 99.

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British Birds

Volume 91 Number 5 May 1998

165 **Hybridisation between Lesser Crested and Sandwich Terns in Valencia, Spain, and plumage of offspring** *J. Ignacio Dies and Bosco Dies*

Announcement
170 The Carl Zeiss Award

171 **Golden and White-tailed Eagles in Scotland and Norway** *Dr D. J. Halley*

179 **Monthly marathon**

From the Rarities Committee's files
180 A report of Long-toed Stint on South Uist *Dr Colin Bradshaw and Peter G. Lansdown*

185 **The Best Annual Bird Report Awards** *Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, Robert Gillmor, R. A. Hume, Derek Moore and Michael J. Rogers*

187 **Conservation research news** *Dr Mark Avery, Dr Lennox Campbell and Dr Ken Smith*

Reviews
189 'The Atlas of Southern African Birds. vol. 1. Non-passerines; vol. 2. Passerines' edited by J. A. Harrison, D. G. Allan, L. G. Underhill, M. Herremans, A. J. Tree, V. Parker & C. J. Brown *Nigel Redman*
189 Short reviews

Letter
190 Mystery warblers in Tselinograd: an attempt to solve part of the problem *Peter de Knijff and Norman D. van Swelm*

192 **Mystery photographs 213** *Peter Lansdown*

Notes
195 White Stork fishing from the air *Jan Ševčík*
195 Female Aythya hybrid resembling Lesser Scaup *A. H. J. Harrop*
197 Roosting behaviour of Peregrine Falcons *Jeff A. Davies*
198 Long-distance vagrancy of Ptarmigan *Bojan Milchev and Ursula Georgieva*
198 Whimbrels thermalling *R. W. Arnold*
199 Lesser Black-backed Gull apparently picking up and dropping live Stoat *Geoff Hosey and Marie Jacques*
199 Kittiwakes and Great Crested Grebes 'flycatching' *John Brucker*
200 Collared Doves feeding from fresh Rabbit carcase *Dr A. P. Radford*
200 Savi's Warbler imitating Bearded Tit and Water Rail *Josef Chytil*
201 Wintering Blackcaps taking nectar from, and probably pollinating, Mahonia *Brian Harrup*
201 Blue Tits nesting in standard bat-box with fatal results *George Yates and John Matthews*

203 **News and comment** *Wendy Dickson and Bob Scott*

207 **Looking back**

208 **Recent BBRC decisions** *M. J. Rogers*

208 **Recent reports** *Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan*

Line-drawings: 165 Lesser Crested Tern with Sandwich Terns (*Frederick J. Watson*); 171 Golden and White-tailed Eagles (*Keith Brockie*)

Front cover: Eurasian Jackdaws *Corvus monedula* (*Barry Ryan*): the original of this month's cover design, measuring 22.6 × 22.4 cm, is for sale in a postal auction (see page 66 for procedure).

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Volume 91 Number 6 June 1998

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25x or 40x eyepiece 89
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30x (WA) eyepiece 159
60x eyepiece 138
77x eyepiece 125
20-60x zoom eyepiece 185
Camera adaptor 800mm 150
Skua case 54
27x (WA) Screw-in-eyepiece 74
TS-611 body (45°) 229
TS-612 body 209
TS-613 Fluorite body (45°) 449
TS-614 Fluorite body 429
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10 x 42 Dioptron 179
10 x 50 Dioptron 199
8 x 32 (HRII) 197
8 x 42 (HRII) 199
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10 x 50 (HRII) 229
8½ x 50 (HRII) 229
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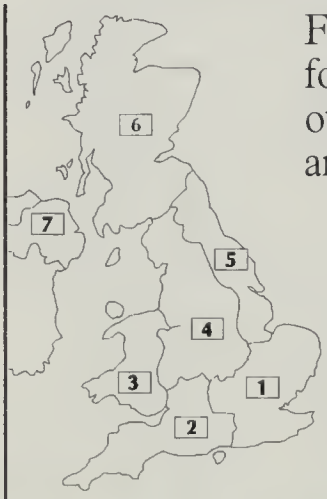

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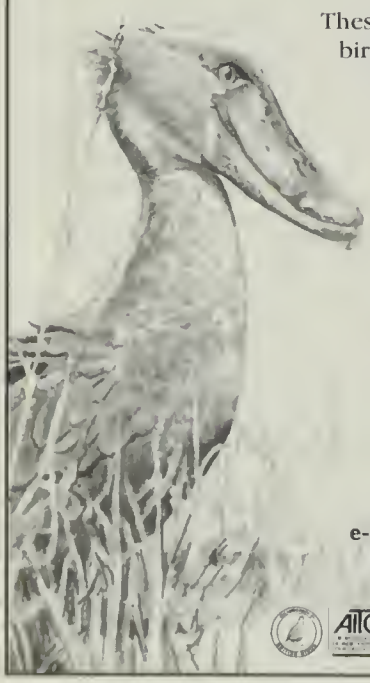

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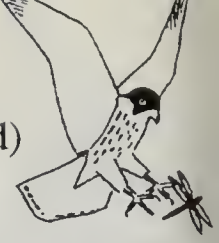

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EDITORIAL

Editorial Board changes

We invited applications to join the Editorial Board (*Brit. Birds* 91: 1) and we are delighted to announce that, from those received, the Board has been expanded to include three new members, all initially for one year.

Ian Carter

Dr Martin Collinson

Nigel Redman

Ian Carter has worked for the JNCC and English Nature, with the Seabirds and Cetaceans Branch based in Aberdeen, at EN's headquarters in Peterborough and, currently, as co-ordinator for the Red Kite *Milvus milvus* re-establishment project.

Dr Martin Collinson is a geneticist, and is currently a Research Fellow at the Royal School of Veterinary Studies in the University of Edinburgh and serves on the Conservation Strategy Committee of the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

Nigel Redman has travelled to 60 countries, including leading about 70 tours to some 40 countries as a staff leader for Birdquest, is now employed as Editor for Pica Press and is serving a second term as Chairman of the Oriental Bird Club.

We welcome Ian, Martin and Nigel to 'the *BB* team'.

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Breeding Marsh Harriers in the United Kingdom, 1983-95

John Underhill-Day

ABSTRACT Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* became extinct as breeding birds in Britain in 1899. There were just three isolated nesting attempts (two successful) between then and recolonisation from 1927 onwards, and none outside Norfolk until 1945. From a peak of 15 nests in 1958, the population declined again, to a single pair in 1971, and the species seemed doomed yet again. A dramatic recovery occurred, however, and by the 1990s the population had outgrown routine annual monitoring. This paper analyses recent nesting habitat and breeding success and describes a national census in 1995 which revealed approximately 148 breeding males and 156 breeding females rearing 350 young.

Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* have been rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom for at least the last 150 years. The destruction of nesting habitat through land drainage and, increasingly, persecution, limited nesting in England to East Anglia, Lincolnshire and Northumberland by the middle of the nineteenth century. By 1880, breeding was confined to the Norfolk Broads, and the last known nesting pair was trapped there in 1899 (Riviere 1930).

Many early records for Ireland and Wales seem more likely to refer to Hen Harriers *C. cyaneus*, but Marsh Harriers probably nested in both countries until the third quarter of the nineteenth century. There are no reliable early records of Marsh Harriers nesting in Scotland.

[*Brit. Birds* 91: 210-218, June 1998] © British Birds Ltd 1998

The first breeding record in England this century was in 1911, on the Norfolk Broads (the eggs were taken), and there were further attempts in 1915 and 1921, both of which were successful. From 1927, Marsh Harriers have nested, with one or more pairs successful in every year to date, except in 1927, 1937 and 1940. Despite this successful recolonisation, during 1927-47 there were no more than five nests recorded in any one year, and the highest number of young fledged in any year was 15, in 1943 (Underhill-Day 1984).

Until 1944, no reliable breeding records were reported outside Norfolk, but in 1945 pairs bred successfully in Anglesey and Suffolk. Numbers then increased to a maximum of 15 nests with 15 young fledged in 1958, and first breeding was reported from Kent (1946), Dorset (1949) and Hampshire (1957) (Harrison 1953; Chapman 1977; R. Dennis verbally).

Between the wars (i.e. 1919-38), numbers were probably limited by the small size of the only area where breeding birds were protected and by heavy persecution elsewhere. After 1945, a reduction in keepered estates, changes in public attitudes, establishment of nature reserves and the passing of the Protection of Birds Act in 1954 probably all contributed to a rising population.

The number of breeding Marsh Harriers then went into a steady and sustained decline until 1971, when only a single pair bred in Britain. The evidence suggested that, as with a number of other raptors (Prestt 1965; Newton 1979; Ratcliffe 1980), Marsh Harrier numbers were affected by organochlorine pesticides. Following the progressive withdrawal of these compounds and an apparent decline in persecution, the population recovered and has continued to rise to the present day.

The population over the period 1911-82 and aspects of the breeding biology of Marsh Harriers were described in detail by Underhill-Day (1984, 1988, 1990), and the purpose of this paper is to update these figures to 1995, when a national breeding census was undertaken.

Although the number of breeding Marsh Harriers in the United Kingdom is small when compared with those in continental Europe (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), the species is of high conservation concern as numbers are still historically low, and it has therefore been categorised as a red-listed species in the revised red data list (Gibbons *et al.* 1996). Apart from Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus* and, in some areas, the re-established Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, this is the only large British raptor with a high proportion of its population breeding in areas of intensive arable farmland.

Methods

Data were gathered through contacts with key workers and recorders, and by visits to less-well-recorded areas each year during 1983-90. By 1990, numbers had increased to the point where detailed annual monitoring was no longer practical, so a national survey was organised in 1995. Information was supplied by reserve wardens, ringers, harrier-watchers and county recorders in all years, with county organisers in those counties with larger populations of harriers in 1995. Until 1990, most recorders had been giving information on breeding success, fledged-brood sizes, reasons for failure if known, and the type of habitat in which the nest was located. In some cases, clutch sizes

were also known, when the nest had been visited under licence for other purposes.

In 1995, recorders were asked to submit this information on a survey form, together with additional information on the characteristics of the breeding site.

A breeding attempt has been recorded here only when observations were made of food being delivered to a nest site, eggs were known to have been laid, young were fledged, or breeding took place in the opinion of an experienced observer. Evidence of nest-building or courtship-feeding alone were not considered sufficient to indicate a breeding attempt.

This may have led to underestimates of the number of breeding attempts where some of these failed early on (at the egg stage), although in some cases harriers which were disturbed at an early stage in the nesting cycle were known to have moved elsewhere to breed. For some pairs, observers were uncertain of the number of fledged young or gave no figure, although they believed the nest to have been successful. The minimum figures are used in all tables and analyses.

Not all recorders were able to supply the full information asked for, so that, in the analyses which follow, there are different sample sizes depending on the available data.

It is possible that Marsh Harriers have been recorded breeding outside the known areas during this period and, in an effort to minimise the possibility of missing these records, all rumours of breeding have been followed up. Invariably, these have proved to refer to summering birds, with no proof of breeding. Some records of breeding in earlier years have come to light subsequently in existing breeding areas, but these have been few.

Results

Numbers of breeding male and female Marsh Harriers during 1983-90 and in 1995, together with total numbers of fledged young, mean number per nest and per successful nest, are shown in table 1. The number of nests which failed, percentage failure rates and nests for which no result was known are also shown. As this species can be polygynous, males and females are shown separately and number of females equals number of nests except in 1986 (1 re-nest) and 1989 (2 re-nests), when the number of nests were 35 and 70 respectively. Figures for 1991-94, taken from the Rare Breeding Birds Panel's reports (Ogilvie *et al.* 1994-96), are also shown. The incidence of polygyny was uncertain for nests in some areas in 1995, so the number of males is estimated for that year.

During all years, at least 98 pairings were bigynous and 15 trigynous, collectively 21% of all pairings. There was no significant difference in nesting success (as measured by production of at least one fledged young) between monogynous and polygynous pairings for all nests during 1983-90 & 1995[1]. Nor was there a significant difference in mean fledged-brood size between nests of monogynous (mean 3.11) and polygynous males (mean 3.05) at the same sites in years when both were present[2].

Population growth during the period was 17.3% per annum for breeding adults. For the period 1983-90 & 1995, productivity was at least 2.43 fledglings per nest started (n=542 nests), and, for the whole period, a

[1] χ^2=1.65, n=542 [2] t=0.19, n=75

Table 1. Data concerning breeding male and female Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* in the United Kingdom in 1983-90 & 1995 (this study) and 1991-94 (Rare Breeding Birds Panel). * one re-nest included; ** two re-nests included.

Year	Breeding ♂♂	Breeding ♀♀	Young reared	Mean young fledged per known nest	Mean young fledged per successful nest	Failed nests	% failed of known nests	Nests for which no result known
1983	21	28	73	2.61	2.92	3	10.7	-
1984	22	28	66	2.36	2.75	4	14.3	-
1985	28	31	86	2.97	3.18	2	6.6	2
1986	28	35*	81	2.38	3.00	7	20.0	1
1987	39	46	122	2.65	3.12	7	15.2	-
1988	55	62	145	2.46	3.09	12	21.8	3
1989	59	70**	181	2.66	3.18	11	16.2	2
1990	73	86	213	2.66	3.09	11	13.6	6
1991	83	91	198					
1992	101	112	229					
1993	84	110	244					
1994	114	129	255					
1995	148?	156	350	2.30	2.94	33	21.7	4
TOTAL 1983-90 & 1995	473	542	1,317	2.43	3.03	90	16.6	18

minimum of 2,243 young harriers fledged from 984 nests. Of 542 nests started during 1983-90 & in 1995, 90 (16.6%) failed, but there was no significant trend towards higher or lower failure rates in later years[3].

Mean clutch size from 19 nests was 4.4[4], and there was no significant difference in failure rates between visited (36.8%) and unvisited (19.4%) nests[5], although failures were higher in the former.

In table 2, the reasons for nest failure are given, where known, for this study and for the period 1971 (when there was only one nest in Britain) to 1982. There was no significant difference in the proportion of nests failing through human intervention between the two periods[6]. About 24% of failures during 1983-90 & 1995 were caused by human persecution or disturbance. Of eight incidents of flooding, seven were caused by tidal inundation of coastal reedbeds and one by heavy rain. Where nests were preyed on, the suspected predator in all cases was the Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*. Other causes of failure were infertile eggs (2), crop fall (1) and fire (1). Where the timing was known, 13 (60%) of failures were during incubation and nine (40%) during the nestling stage.

Nesting habitat was recorded for 513 out of 542 nests during 1983-90 & in 1995 (table 3). Of these, 86% were in beds of Common Reed *Phragmites australis*, 6% in Oil-seed Rape *Brassica napus* and 7% in winter cereals. All the cereal nests were in winter Wheat, except two in winter Barley and one in winter Oats. In addition, one nest was recorded in rough grass and one in a bed of Sea Club-rush *Scirpus maritimus*.

In 1995, additional details of the hydrology of the reedbeds were sought (table 4), and, of 112 recorded reedbed nests, 65% were in wet, 12% in dry

[3] Test for linear trend in proportions, $Z = 1.51$, $p = 0.13$, ns
[4] SE=0.14 [5] $\chi^2 = 2.98$, ns [6] $\chi^2 = 4.64$, n=120

Table 2. Causes of Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* nest failures in the United Kingdom during 1983-90 & 1995 compared with 1971-82.

Cause	NUMBER 1971-82	NUMBER 1983-90 & 1995	PERCENTAGE 1971-82	PERCENTAGE 1983-90 & 1995
Unknown	7	41	23.3	45.5
Human persecution	6	15	20.0	16.7
Predation	2	8	6.7	8.9
Nest flooded	4	8	13.3	8.9
Human disturbance	4	7	13.3	7.8
Desertion/disappearance of adult	5	7	16.7	7.8
Other	2	4	6.7	4.4
TOTAL	30	90		

Table 3. Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* nesting habitat in United Kingdom during 1983-90 & 1995.

Habitat	Successful nests	%	Failed nests	%	Total nests
Reedbed	367	83.4	73	16.6	440
Crops	56	76.7	17	23.3	73
TOTAL	423	82.4	90	17.6	513

Table 4. Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* nesting habitat in the United Kingdom in 1995.

Habitat	SUCCESSFUL NESTS Number	SUCCESSFUL NESTS %	FAILED NESTS Number	FAILED NESTS %	TOTAL NESTS
Reed:					
Wet	60	82.2	13	17.8	73
Dry	8	57.1	6	42.9	14
Tidal	17	85.0	3	15.0	20
Unspecified	2	40.0	3	60.0	5
TOTAL	87	77.7	25	22.3	112
Crops:					
Oil-seed Rape	5	55.6	4	44.4	9
Winter Wheat	18	85.7	3	14.3	21
Winter Barley	0	0.0	1	100.0	1
TOTAL	23	74.2	8	25.8	31
Other:					
Sea Club-rush	1	100.0	0	0.0	1
Not known	12				12
TOTAL	13				13

and 18% in tidal reedbeds. There was no significant difference in success rates between reedbed and crop nests. Sample sizes for failures in dry and tidal reedbeds were too small to permit analysis. Sample sizes within crops were also too small for analysis in 1995, but, combined with data from 1983-90, there was a significantly higher success rate for nests in winter Wheat (89%, n=38) than in Oil-seed Rape (66%, n=32)[7]. The highest success rate was in wet/tidal reedbeds and winter Wheat and the lowest in dry reedbeds and Oil-seed Rape. The causes of six failures in dry reedbed in 1995 were predation

[7] $\chi^2=5.74$, $p<0.05$, n=70

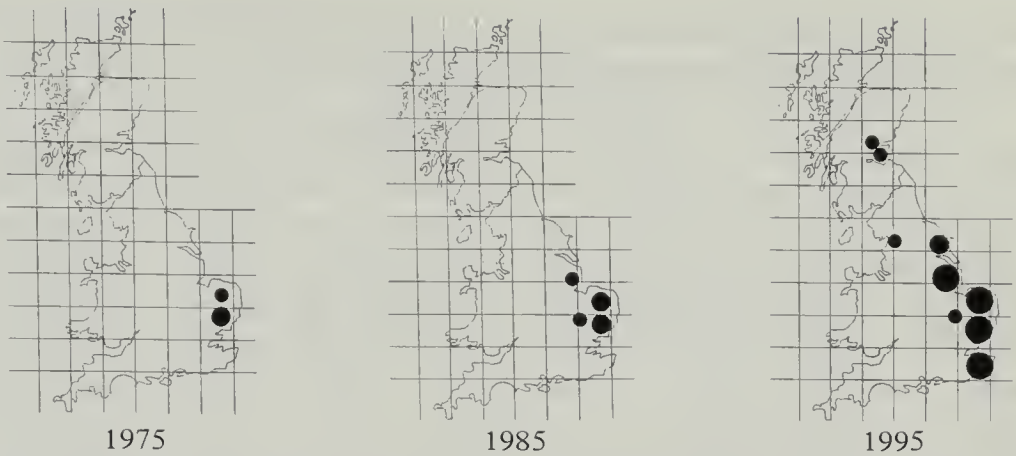

Fig. 1. Breeding distribution of Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* **in Britain in 1975, 1985 and 1995.** Three dot sizes represent • <5 nests, ● 6-15 nests and ⬤ 16+ nests.

(1), human disturbance (1), bad weather (1), and unknown (3). Of ten failed nests in Oil-seed Rape from 1983, three probably resulted from predation by foxes, in one case the male disappeared and in another the eggs were infertile. The cause of the remaining five failures was not known. The proportion of nests in crops increased from 10% in 1983 to over 20% in 1995.

There were no significant differences in 1995 in fledged-brood sizes from successful nests between wet, dry or tidal reed, winter cereals and Oil-seed Rape[8]. The largest mean fledged-brood size was from nests in winter cereals (3.57±0.85), and the smallest from tidal reedbed nests (2.75±0.86). The largest fledged broods, of six young, were from three nests in reed, winter Wheat and Oil-seed Rape, all in 1989.

There were no significant differences in percentage nesting success or mean fledged-brood sizes between successful nests in small (<5 ha), medium (>5-<50 ha) and large (>50 ha) reedbeds (small, 24.7%, 3.10; medium 17.6%, 2.84; large 15.1%, 3.12)[9].

A high proportion of nests in 1995 were close to salt water. Of 156 nests, 73.7% were within 5 km of the coast and a further 7.7% within 5 km of a large estuary. Altogether, 86.5% of nest sites were within 10 km of the sea or a large estuary, and only 13.5% of nest sites were well inland.

It was difficult to define the number of sites in which nesting was recorded because many nests were in fields, fieldside ditches, fleets or small patches of reed. In some areas there were loose aggregations of nests around a block of fields. In 1983, about 11% of all nests were in crops, ditches or small remnant reedbeds in predominantly arable areas; by 1995, 55% of nests were in this habitat. The proportion of nests in large (>50 ha) reedbeds had declined only slightly, from 36% to 28%, but the proportion of nests in small to medium (5-50 ha) reedbeds had dropped from 39% to 17% during the same period.

Of 156 nest sites in 1995, 85 were in Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and 72 were in nature reserves. In a few cases, sites which were SSSIs were not reserves, or reserves were undesignated. In total, 88 sites (56%) were SSSIs or nature reserves, or both.

In 1995, nesting records were received from nine counties in England and Scotland, and breeding was recorded in a further three during 1983-90.

[8] F=1.23, n=95 [9] χ^2=4.31, n=501; F=2.73, n=352

Table 5. Comparison of nesting success of Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* from various studies in north and northwest Europe during 1971-95.

		MEAN FLEDGED YOUNG FROM:					
		All nests		Successful nests		%	
Country	Years	Mean±SE	(N)	Mean±SE	(N)	successful	Reference
Britain	1971-82	2.39±0.13	(142)	3.03±0.11	(112)	78.9	Underhill-Day 1984
Czechoslovakia	1980-82	2.96±0.18	(108)	3.72±0.13	(86)	79.6	Divis 1984
Denmark	1978-83	2.41±0.04	(764)	2.75±0.03	(670)	87.7	Jørgensen 1985
Netherlands	1975-85	2.60±0.13	(130)	3.04±0.11	(109)	83.8	Woets 1986
Poland	1982-84	2.47	(118)	3.10	(95)	80.5	Witkowski 1989
France	1983-88	1.49	(383)	2.50	(370)	96.6	Bavoux *et al.* 1989
Germany	1988-89	2.00	(128)	3.50	(73)	57.0	Aust & Otto 1990
Britain	1983-90	2.61±0.08	(371)	3.09±0.06	(313)	84.4	This study
Britain	1995	2.32±0.13	(152)	2.97±0.10	(119)	78.3	This study

During 1983-90, nearly 97% of all records were in southern/eastern England, with 89% in Norfolk and Suffolk. In 1995, 88% of all records were still in the southeast, but the proportion in Norfolk and Suffolk was down to 60%. Small numbers are now breeding regularly in northwest England, in Scotland and on Humberside, with occasional breeding elsewhere.

Discussion

The mean percentage annual increase of 17.3% in the number of breeding Marsh Harriers since 1983 has been slightly lower than during the period 1971-82, when it was 21.5%, and the incidence of polygyny has also dropped from 32% to 21% (Underhill-Day 1984). If the future population continues to increase at the current rate, it could reach 750 nests by the year 2005. Mean fledged young per nest and per successful nest and success rates since 1983 are within the range recorded in other recent European studies (table 5) and are not significantly different from those in Britain during the previous period. Causes of nest failure have been less well recorded in the much larger population in recent years, but recorded instances of human persecution and disturbance accounted for 24% of nest failures during 1983-90 & in 1995, a reduction from 33% during 1971-82 (table 2). During the earlier period, all incidents recorded under persecution (n=6) were from egg-collectors, whereas, during the later period (n=15), three clutches were collected and one deliberately smashed, one breeding adult shot and two poisoned, and eight suspected instances of deliberate disturbance followed by desertion. In addition, there were two incidents of poisoning and three of shooting of non-breeding harriers, and one clutch was part-robbed. In 1996, there were two further recorded incidents of poisoning and one of shooting (RSPB data). It seems probable from this limited information that egg-collecting has declined and that persecution has increased, although it remains at low levels.

The first recorded Marsh Harrier nesting in a crop in Britain was in winter Barley in 1982, when the pair reared three young. By 1995, of 144 nests where the surrounding habitat was recorded, 31 (21.5%) were in arable crops, with winter cereals being clearly favoured. All known crop-nesting has taken place in the Southeast, mostly in Norfolk, Kent and Lincolnshire.

The available data suggest that crop-nesting Marsh Harriers are as successful (rearing as many young) as those nesting in reedbeds, with nests in winter Wheat being particularly successful. The lack of human disturbance on arable land, particularly early in spring when harriers are prospecting for nest sites, and the low populations of foxes in some arable areas, combined with the unattractiveness of the centre of cereal fields for wildlife and, therefore, for ground predators, may all have contributed to the success of harrier nests in this habitat. Concentration of potential prey into field-edge habitats and lack of competition from other predators, together with high numbers of prey animals such as Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* feeding on wind-laid crops and stubbles in late summer, when harriers are feeding large young, may also play a part in their success in rearing large broods (Underhill-Day 1985). The longer, narrower-stalked Barley is more susceptible to laying by wind than is Wheat and is also harvested earlier, which may explain the strong preference for Wheat as a nesting habitat.

In the past, when Marsh Harrier numbers have declined, the large reedbed reserves have been the most important habitat, with nesting persisting longest in such sites (Underhill-Day 1984). During the current population expansion, sites associated with arable agriculture have been of central importance.

Marsh Harriers are the only large raptors (apart from very small numbers of Montagu's Harriers and, locally, re-established Red Kites) nesting in intensively farmed arable areas in Britain. Over half of the breeding population is now nesting in crops, ditches or small reedbeds in fleets or borrow dykes associated with arable areas. Very few of these sites are within SSSIs or nature reserves (11 such sites in, or on the edge of, arable areas were in SSSIs, and none in nature reserves, in 1995). The sympathy and concern of arable landowners and farmers is likely to be a critical factor in the future increase and spread of Marsh Harriers in Britain.

Acknowledgments

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LOOKING BACK

Fifty years ago: 'From the summer of 1940 until May 1945 we were in various prison camps scattered over Germany and Poland . . . Crested Larks (*Galerida c. cristata*) were seen wherever we stayed and often bred within a hundred yards of us, but always outside the wire. So in each succeeding year we were able to see but little of their breeding behaviour. Add to this repeated disappointment the necessity for carrying food and not mountainous piles of bird notes when we were set marching in the last winter and it will be understood why so few written notes survive. From them and from those written in a more sympathetic atmosphere in the early summer of 1946 we have compiled the following paragraphs.

'The commonest call is one we christened "God save the Queen". This is written by Niethammer (1937) as "tritritrieh" and in *The Handbook* (1938) "whee-whee-wheeoo." The third note is relatively unaccented and the fourth higher pitched than the others, though trailing away slightly. The notes have an undefinable sibilant quality which none of the three representations suggests. The rhythm of the call is exactly represented by the words we use. Variations are common, particularly the omission of the first note. [JOHN H. BARRETT, P. J. CONDER and A. J. B. THOMPSON]' (*Brit. Birds* 41: 162, June 1948)

BIRD PHOTOGRAPH OF THE YEAR

Our system of judging has become established over the past 22 years. First, we project all the entries in quick succession, so that the judges get a 'feel' for the general standard. Secondly, we take a more leisurely look at each transparency, and, if any aspect attracts attention—and there is usually something about every one—the non-photographer judge (JTRS) reads out aloud the relevant parts of the entrant's accompanying letter and description of the circumstances in which the photograph was taken, without revealing the photographer's name. This is when questions such as 'Was it taken in the UK?', 'What lens was used?' or 'How did the photographer get so close to the bird?' get answered. If any of the judges want to retain the photograph, it stays in at this stage, providing the first short-list (40 transparencies this year). This selection of superb images has to be cut drastically at the next stage: during a third projection session, we chat at length about each picture. A consensus is reached on retention or rejection (however much one judge may like a photograph, there is no point in insisting on its retention if none of his four colleagues is in favour). The aim is to reduce the selection to about 20 for the final short-list (we achieved 21 this year). Then comes the voting. The final-short-list entries are re-projected several times while the judges silently (mostly!), independently and secretly place them all in order (from 1 to 21 this year). These scores are then summed and the winners emerge. It is only at this stage that the names of the photographers are revealed, and the judges were, this year, very surprised to discover that the top five places were occupied by slides from just two photographers (see below).

This year, four photographers had all three of their entries retained in the first short-list (Dr Jens Eriksen, Dr Mark Hamblin, Philip Newman and Roger Tidman), and a further six had two retained (Neil Bowman, Dr Kevin Carlson, Gordon Langsbury, Mike McKavett, Jouni Ruuskanen and Gary Smith). The second short-list still included all three of Jens Eriksen's and Philip Newman's entries, and two of Gordon Langsbury's. After the secret ballot, these winners emerged:

1st	**Sooty Falcon** *Falco concolor* **(plate 73)**	**Jens Eriksen**
2nd	Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* (plate 74)	Jens Eriksen
3rd	Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*	Philip Newman
4th	Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix* (plate 75)	Philip Newman
5th	Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* (plate 76)	Philip Newman
6th=	Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* (plate 77)	Roger Tidman
6th=	Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* (plate 78)	James Walford

8th= Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* (Dr Jens Eriksen), 8th= Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius* (Dr Kevin Carlson), 10th Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (Wayne Richardson), 11th Barn Owl *Tyto alba* (Gary Smith), 12th Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (Gordon Langsbury), 13th Common Kestrel (R. J. C. Blewitt), 14th= Hen Harrier (Dr Mark Hamblin), 14th= Ptarmigan *Lagopus mutus* (Reston Kilgour), 16th Glossy Ibises *Plegadis falcinellus* (Gordon Langsbury), 17th Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* (Hanne Eriksen), 18th Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* (Mike Lane), 19th Hedge Accentors

Prunella modularis (Bob Glover), 20th Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* (Pekko Helo), and 21st Blue Tits *Parus caeruleus* (A. P. Clarke). Other photographers initially short-listed were: Neil Bowman, D. Johnson, G. Higginbotham, Christer Kalenius, Mike McKavett, Jouni Ruuskanen, Ray Tipper and Martin Turner.

Philip Newman's Hen Harrier shot did, however, look familiar to one of the judges, and we later discovered that the Spring 1998 issue of the RSPB magazine *Birds* (page 32) had published an essentially identical photograph of the same bird on the top of the same small conifer. The rules state that 'Photographs must not have been submitted for publication elsewhere.' Philip Newman had been unaware of this restriction and the judges accepted that he had submitted his entry in good faith. Nevertheless, this transparency had to be disqualified, and the one voted fourth upgraded to third place; this results in another of Philip Newman's entries, his Black Grouse (plate 75), qualifying for the official third prize.

Turning now to the photographs themselves, Jens Eriksen's winning Sooty Falcon (plate 73) was unanimously admired as the best flight photograph of a raptor any of the judges could recall. The unworn pale edges to this immature's feathers give the bird a crisply immaculate appearance; it is, of course, in perfect focus, and the plain background enhances the portrait. Using no hide or camouflage, Jens was lucky that this falcon took an interest in him standing on the cliff top of Sawadi island in Oman, and flew past closely a number of times to satisfy its curiosity.

Jens Eriksen spent several full days in a hide at his local sewage-treatment works at the Al Ansab Lagoons in northern Oman. The Greenshank (plate 74) never succeeded in swallowing this Arabian Toad *Bufo arabicus*. The judges were amazed that it should even try.

Philip Newman's classic Black Grouse portrait (plate 75) was obtained from a hide set up near a lek. Black plumage is notoriously difficult to photograph, the results often failing to show any detail.

A hide strategically placed 8 m from a rock frequently used by Dippers going to their nest enabled Philip Newman to obtain his photograph of one carrying nesting material (plate 76), a change from the more usual photographs of them with food for their young or carrying a faecal sac.

Past winner Roger Tidman's Turtle Dove (plate 77) adopted this pose, first with one wing and then the other, for about five minutes in an area near his hide where 'there were many ants . . . some on the bird's plumage, but whether it was actively "anting" or merely "sunning", I could not be sure.'

Inviting a chorus of 'Aah's, James Walford's female Black-winged Stilt (plate 78) was yelping in alarm at her four chicks, particularly the straggler, as her mate overhead 'confronted a marauding Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*'. Photographing from a position of concealment, James noted that he had to keep all five birds in the frame, aim for good composition and also keep them all within the narrow band of sharp focus, 'all of which called for good timing and the best accessory of all, a slice of good fortune.'

The British Birds Young Photographer of the Year Award was won by David Norton (who also won this under-25 award last year) with a photograph of a male Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa* singing from a

▲ 73. **BIRD PHOTOGRAPH OF THE YEAR 1998: Sooty Falcon** *Falco concolor*, **Sultanate of Oman, October 1997** (Nikon F5; Nikkor 300 mm AF-S 1:2.8D lens + 1.4× converter; 1/500th, f4; Fujichrome 50 Velvia) (*Jens Eriksen*)

▼ 74. **SECOND PRIZE: Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*, **Sultanate of Oman, September 1997** (Nikon F5; Nikkor 600 mm AF-1 1:4D lens +1.4× converter; 1/125th, f8; Fujichrome 50 Velvia) (*Jens Eriksen*)

▲ 75. **THIRD PRIZE: Black Grouse** *Tetrao tetrix*, **Kincardineshire, April 1997** (Canon EOS 1N; Canon 500 mm USM L; 1/500th, f5.6; Sensia 100)(*Philip Newman*)

◀ 76. **FOURTH: Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus*, **Kincardineshire, April 1997** (Canon EOS 1N; Canon 500 USM L + 1.4× converter; 1/80th, f6.3; Sensia 100)(*Philip Newman*)

▲ 77. **FIFTH EQUAL: Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur*, **Spain, June 1997** (Canon EOS 5; 300 mm + 1.4× converter; 1/250th, f9.5; Sensia 100)(*Roger Tidman*)

▼ 78. **FIFTH EQUAL: Black-winged Stilts** *Himantopus himantopus*, **Mallorca, May 1997** (Nikon F4; 500 mm F4 + 1.4× converter; Fuji Provia 100)(*James Walford*)

mound of soil. The Award is now sponsored by the Eric Hosking Trust, and David will receive an engraved crystal goblet as well as the usual cheque.

As always, the judges enjoyed their task and are glad to be able to share some of their pleasure with *BB* readers. Thanks to *Pica Press* and *T. & A. D. Poyser,* all the short-listed photographers will be able to meet up at a Press Reception in London later this year.

J. T. R. Sharrock, R. J. Chandler, Robin Chittenden, David Hosking and Don Smith

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MONTHLY MARATHON

We have a winner! A new 'Marathon' starts now. Read on.

The preening bird (plate 30) was named as:

Little Crake *Porzana parva* (24%), Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* (23%), Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta* (13%), Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos* (12%), Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* (8%), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata* (6%), Least Sandpiper *C. minutilla* (5%), Little Stint *C. minuta* (4%), Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* (3%), Sora Crake *P. carolina* (2%) and Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* (< 1%).

Only one person got it right: it was a Red-necked Phalarope, photographed in Shetland in summer 1980 by Nick Dymond.

The one successful identifier was one of the three leaders, David McAdams (Germany), who thereby surged ahead of Stephen Foster (Co. Antrim) and Richard Patient (Cambridge) to scoop the SUNBIRD holiday prize, with a total of 18 correct answers. Truly a marathon this time! Congratulations to David McAdams, and commiserations to all the runners-up, especially the two pipped at the post.

The new, tenth 'Monthly marathon' commences, therefore, with plate 42 in the April issue, last month's plate 49 is the second stage, and plate 79 (below) is the third stage. *The deadline for all three is now 15th July 1998*, and the three answers may all be put on one postcard.

New rules now apply: the winner of the tenth 'Marathon' will need to achieve an unbroken run of at least ten correct answers. This keeps up the interest for everyone, since someone lying in midfield may suddenly find himself or herself in the lead if the leaders all stumble over one hurdle. Good luck!

▲ 79. **'Monthly marathon'**. Photo no. 142. Third stage in tenth 'Marathon'. Identify the species. *Read the rules* (*Brit. Birds* 89: 24), then send in your answer *on a postcard* to Monthly Marathon, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ, to arrive by 15th July 1998.

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Spectacled Warbler in North Yorkshire: new to Britain and Ireland

Craig C. Thomas, Richard E. Harbird and Peter J. Dunn

ABSTRACT A Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata* watched and trapped at Filey, North Yorkshire, during 24th-29th May 1992 is the first incontrovertible record of this Mediterranean species in Britain and Ireland.

Mid to late May 1992 was dominated by settled anticyclonic conditions with prevailing easterly winds and coastal mist. Conditions at Filey, North Yorkshire, were therefore near perfect when CCT and REH decided to 'work' the Long Hedge towards the Tip at 08.15 GMT on 24th May.

After 400 m with nothing of note, CCT spotted a movement in the hedge 20 m ahead. Although largely obscured, the bird was clearly a warbler with dark lores, but initial thoughts of Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* were quashed when it hopped onto an exposed branch. CCT's heartbeat quickened as he immediately switched to the telescope before shouting over to REH that he had found 'an interesting *Sylvia*'. Within seconds, REH had ploughed through a hole in the hedge so small that a Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* would normally have struggled to get through, and together they watched the warbler feeding out in the open.

Several features fitted Spectacled Warbler *S. conspicillata*, notably the small body size, blackish lores, bright rufous wings, pale lower mandible, white throat contrasting with salmon-pink underparts, bright legs and small

▲▼ 80 & 81. Male Spectacled Warblers *Sylvia conspicillata*: above, Mallorca, Spain, April 1993 (*David M. Cottridge*); below, Filey, North Yorkshire, May 1992 (*Robin Chittenden*)

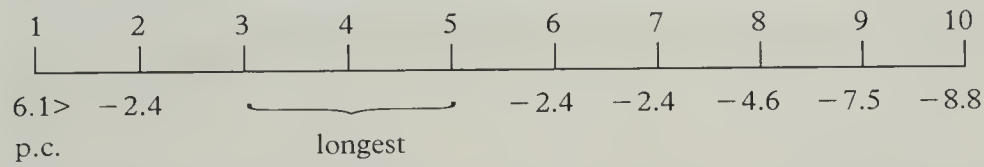
primary projection. After studying the bird for a further five minutes, the suggestion was made, via the CB radio, to PJD, who was ringing in the Country Park, that he should bring the nets to trap 'an interesting *Sylvia*'. He arrived in no time at all.

Within seconds, the bird started to call and sing briefly and, as the initial scepticism of a gathering crowd waned, all present soon agreed, but could not really believe, that it had to be a Spectacled Warbler. PJD put up the net and, with almost military precision, the first attempt netted a Common Whitethroat *S. communis* and then the Spectacled Warbler. As they were extracted and held side by side, the size difference caused euphoria.

Both birds were taken back to the Country Park to be processed; the Spectacled Warbler was held for 30 minutes before being released—unringed—into Arndale, ahead of advancing rain clouds (PJD had concentrated on getting a full in-hand description and biometrics, but forgot to ring it before release). The bird was released well away from crop fields to eliminate potential damage, and Arndale, with its easy access, seemed ideal. The Spectacled Warbler thought otherwise, however, and it was not seen again that day. To everyone's relief, it was relocated in the field hedges the following morning and, despite crowd pressure, was seen well by 1,500 visitors over the next five days, with no crop damage; it was last seen at dusk on 29th May.

Description

Wing formula (measurements in mm):



SIZE AND STRUCTURE A typical *Sylvia* warbler structurally, approximately two-thirds the size of a Common Whitethroat. Distinctly shorter-winged, with a primary projection one-third the length of the exposed tertials. Wing length = 58 mm.

In flight, combination of short wings and relatively long tail produced distinctive appearance, not unlike that of a Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*. Tail length = 52.7 mm.

HEAD Medium grey in tone, with subtle brownish suffusion on nape contrasting with blackish lores which extended to just above and below eye. White eye-ring broader above, with small break at rear of eye. Chin and throat pure white.

UPPERPARTS Mantle, back and scapulars warm brown, though not so rufous as on wings, with contrasting greyish-brown rump.

WINGS Primaries brown with heavily abraded fringes. Two innermost secondaries brown, relieved by bright chestnut edges. Rest of secondaries duller, but nevertheless forming bright chestnut wing-panel in combination with broad-edged greater coverts. Tertials heavily abraded, with sharply demarcated dark centres and chestnut edges. Alula dark brown, edged buff.

TAIL Dark brown with conspicuous white centres to outer feathers, decreasing on inner tail feathers.

UNDERPARTS Breast, flanks and upper belly salmon-pink contrasting with demarcated white throat. Lower belly and undertail-coverts buff.

BARE PARTS Bill appeared thinner and relatively longer than that of Common Whitethroat. Dark horn upper mandible with yellowish cutting edge. Lower mandible

yellowish-pink at base, with distal one-third dark horn. Iris rich chestnut and orbital ring dark brown. Legs and feet bright orange-yellow.

VOICE Song quieter and more melodic than that of Common Whitethroat, interspersed with sweeter notes. Call a very distinctive, even 'trrr', uttered frequently.

Over the duration of its stay, the Spectacled Warbler gradually became easier to see and, indeed, appeared to have set up territory in one particular stretch of hedge, where it could be watched and photographed (plate 81). Its departure, on the night of 29th/30th May, coincided with the arrival of a weather front.

Status in the UK

The Spectacled Warbler has had a rough passage onto the British List. The first accepted record, at Spurn, East Yorkshire, during 21st-31st October 1968 (*Brit. Birds* 71: 53-58), was subsequently proved from in-the-hand photographs to have been a first-winter female Subalpine Warbler *S. cantillans*. Subsequent records had been accepted, of a male at Porthgwarra, Cornwall, on 17th October 1969 (*Brit. Birds* 71: 84-85), and a male on Fair Isle, Shetland, on 4th-5th June 1979 (*Brit. Birds* 73: 523), but, following the rejection of the Spurn bird, the burden of proof which fell upon these records increased, since either could now have to stand alone as the first British record. In the event, a review judged that, although it was by no means certain that either bird had been misidentified, the amount of detail supplied in support of the two records was not sufficient for either to remain on the British List, and both were rejected (*Brit. Birds* 83: 482-483; 84: 431-432; *Ibis* 133: 219-223). The identification criteria of Spectacled Warbler have been discussed by Shirihai (1988), Shirihai *et al.* (1991) and Small (1996).

Status in Europe

Spectacled Warbler is a Mediterranean species with two distinct breeding populations. The much larger western population breeds on the Atlantic Islands (except the Azores), and in the western Mediterranean from Morocco and Iberia in the west to Italy and Libya in the east. The eastern component occupies Cyprus, southwestern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and possibly some southern and western parts of Turkey. Although there is little evidence concerning population trends, there has been a small-scale northward expansion of the population in Spain, France and Italy. The total European breeding population is considered to be between 157,000 and 319,000 pairs (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

The western population appears to be far more migratory than those in the east. The Iberian, Corsican, Sardinian and Italian birds practically all disappear in winter, but the species is considered resident or only partially migratory in Malta and Northwest Africa. The southern extent of its wintering distribution is poorly known, owing to the relatively small size of the population, but appears to be as far south as Senegal, southwestern Mauritania, southeastern Algeria, and northern Niger. By contrast, the species is common on its breeding grounds in Cyprus and Israel throughout

the winter, although it is a scarce winter visitor to Egypt as far south as Luxor, indicating that at least a few migrate a short distance (Cramp 1992).

Origins

The origin of the Filey bird can never be known for certain, but the larger population size and higher degree of migratory movement shown by the western population would lead one to suppose that this is more likely to be the source. One piece of evidence which supports this supposition is the presence in Britain of an impressive list of rarities during the late spring of 1992, including eight Subalpine Warblers during 20th-28th May, a Marmora's Warbler *S. sarda* at Spurn on 8th-9th June, and a Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* in Greater London on 31st May (*Brit. Birds* 86: 513-515; 88: 505), all of which could also have originated in the western Mediterranean.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Dr Colin Bradshaw, Chairman of the British Birds Rarities Committee, commented as follows: 'Given the past history of Spectacled Warbler on the British List, it was imperative that the first to be accepted should be beyond all doubt in both the identification and circumstances of the record. That was certainly the case with this individual. A spring adult male singing and setting up territory, which was trapped, posed for photographs and was seen by many hundreds of birders, was even better than we could have wished for. Not surprisingly, it was accepted on its first circulation.

'Even the identification of adult males can be problematic, although, as the previous British claims testify, identifying female and immature birds is more difficult. The combination of very short primary projection, an almost concolorous rufous wing interrupted only by well-defined narrow black tertial and inner greater-covert centres, a very contrasting tail pattern of white outer tail feathers and almost black inner tail feathers, and a distinctive "trrrr" call, unlike the hard "tac" of Subalpine Warbler or low "churrr" of Common Whitethroat, are constant identification features for

all ages and sexes. Adult males, in addition, show a black loral area, white crescents above and below the eye, an intense vinous-pink wash to the underparts and a plain grey rump. Whilst a male Spectacled Warbler would stand out in a fall of Common Whitethroats, an isolated bird might be more difficult. The commonly held perception of the 1980s, that "Spectacled Warblers have chestnut wings while Subalpine Warblers have grey-brown wings" has been disproved, as documented by Lansdown *et al.* (1991).'

Dr David T. Parkin, Chairman of the BOURC, has commented as follows: 'Spectacled Warbler had long been anticipated as an addition to the British List when the Filey bird was found in May 1992. Despite being a short-distance migrant, the appearance of the globally rarer (and even more sedentary) Marmora's Warbler in earlier years had whetted birders' appetites for this Mediterranean gem.

'As reported above, the species had a somewhat chequered history of acceptance, review and rejection. This, coupled with a controversial record from Lepe in Hampshire in April 1988 (that just failed to gain acceptance), had led to a critical assessment of the field characters, in particular its separation from Subalpine Warbler and Common Whitethroat. Consequently, when the Filey bird was found, many birders knew "what to look for".

'The fact that this bird was trapped meant that the record was supported by excellent in-the-hand notes from Peter Dunn. There is no evidence of Spectacled Warbler being commonly kept in captivity or offered for sale, and its arrival in company with an array of classic Mediterranean "spring overshoots" led to its acceptance by the BOURC on a single circulation, and Spectacled Warbler was admitted to Category A of the British List (*Ibis* 136: 254).'

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NOTES

These contributions have all been assessed by the eight members of either the Behaviour Notes Panel or the Identification Notes Panel.

Red-throated Diver feeding young in October

In the late afternoon of 9th October 1993, during a brief seawatch at Emmanuel Head, Holy Island, Northumberland, we noted a winter-plumaged Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata* feeding about 100 m offshore. Shortly after, we noticed another diver in the same area which still had the entirely smoky-grey neck and head of a juvenile Red-throat. We were still watching this young diver when the adult surfaced close by with a fish about 7-8 cm long in its bill. The adult then fed the fish to the juvenile.

Juvenile Red-throated Divers, and probably also juvenile Black-throated Divers *G. arctica*, are believed to become independent after leaving the breeding area (e.g. *BWP* vol. 1). Our observation suggests that at least some juvenile Red-throats also stay with their parents and may be dependent on them through (and after?) their migration. The origin of the population wintering off the Northumberland coast is not known for certain, but ringing recoveries suggest that it is likely to be Fennoscandia and the Northern Isles of Scotland. Bearing in mind also the British breeding distribution of this species, this juvenile had presumably travelled at least 300 km with one or both of its parents before arriving at Holy Island.

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Diving behaviour of Cory's Shearwater

During the latter half of February 1994, while on Tenerife, Canary Islands, my wife and I made a number of boat trips offshore in the seas between the islands of Tenerife and La Gomera (26 km apart). Seabirds were very scarce generally, but at 12.30 hours on 25th February, on a mirror-calm sea beneath a completely cloudless sky, we encountered a group of 22 Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea* on the sea about 10 km west of the cliffs of Los Gigantes in northwest Tenerife. As we approached, we noticed a small number of Common Dolphins *Delphinus delphis* actively feeding in and around the shearwater raft. We drew alongside and observed both species, at less than 10 m, for about 30 minutes. For much of this time, the shearwaters kept close together on the surface, floating buoyantly; occasionally some took off (with no difficulty, in spite of the calm), circled lazily and landed again; one or two made shallow-angled plunges below the surface, remaining submerged for less than a second, in the manner described in *BWP* (vol. 1). Most of the birds dived from the surface occasionally during the period of observation. Before diving, they looked downwards into the sea, with their wings held loosely open at an angle of about 30° above the horizontal. A few shot forwards on the surface a couple of metres,

In this issue, an extra eight-page section of Notes has been financed by interest accrued from the British Birds Investment Fund (see page 230).

before going under with wings in position for forward propulsion, usually remaining submerged for less than one second before resurfacing buoyantly. The majority which dived from the surface, however, did so in the manner of Common Guillemots *Uria aalge*, apart from having their wings nearly fully open before diving; using this method, the shearwaters generally remained under for 2-3 seconds, but a few dives were timed at 7-10 seconds. At one stage, we were so close to the diving birds, and the water was so clear, that we could see them swim powerfully down almost vertically, using both wings and legs, until they became hard to see at an estimated depth of 10 m. No fish or other potential prey could be seen in this 10 m of water, so we concluded that the shearwaters were hunting prey at a greater depth.

BWP (vol. 1) states that Cory's Shearwater feeds 'mainly at night, chiefly by skimming over the surface and surface-feeding', and that it seldom dives, despite Audubon's (1835) statement that the race *borealis* (which breeds in the Canary Islands) frequently dives. Bryan Nelson (1980, *Seabirds: their biology and ecology*) mentioned Great Shearwaters *Puffinus gravis* 'pursuit-plunging' from low heights or from the surface, and contrasted this method with that of Cory's Shearwater, which 'dives rather less and feeds more from the wing, skimming along over the surface, and dipping'. From our observations, it would seem that deep-diving from the surface may not be unusual, perhaps especially in calm conditions.

It is not clear what role the dolphins may have played in guiding the shearwaters to a source of food, or indeed if prey was more readily accessible to the shearwaters because of the feeding actions of the dolphins.

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Little Bittern's reaction to attack by Great Reed Warbler

At 07.45 GMT on 22nd June 1994, in the Riera de Sant Climent, a shallow brackish-water channel in the Llobregat delta, Barcelona, Spain, we observed an aggressive attack by a singing male Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* on a male Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*. While the bittern, which had a nest about 200 m away, was foraging in a 10 × 20-m area of bulrushes *Typha*, a Great Reed Warbler descended towards it from above, giving a repeated monosyllabic 'cr cr cr'. The bittern initially adopted a 'frozen' posture, stretching almost horizontally over the water, but, as the warbler's actions persisted and even increased in intensity, it began to stir. The warbler started to attack with its beak, and the Little Bittern decided to leave; the warbler pursued it, constantly calling, and managed to strike the bittern's back at least twice in flight, the pursuit continuing for about 40 m until the bittern disappeared in a nearby bulrush bed. The area defended by the Great Reed Warbler was subsequently found to contain a new, empty nest. Although, at this site, the two species breed side by side in larger beds of reed *Phragmites* or bulrush, it seems that, in this case, the warbler would not admit intruders into its smaller territory.

The almost horizontal posture initially adopted by the Little Bittern has been recorded once, as an apparent reaction to a hawk, but is otherwise virtually unknown (Voisin, 1991, *The Herons of Europe*). *BWP* (vol. 6) describes the

active anti-predator strategies of adult Great Reed Warblers against the Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, but not those against other species.

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Whooper Swan with white bill-base

On 25th November 1993, at Kilcolman Wildfowl Refuge, Co. Cork, I watched four Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus*. All had snow-white adult plumage, black legs and a black tip to the bill, but two had a white bill-base, rather than the normal yellow coloration of adults; on one of the two, this white showed an extremely faint pink tinge. I watched the swans for 25 minutes before they left the lake. During this time, the behaviour of the white-billed individuals indicated that they either were a pair or were the young of the two normal adults, since they remained closely associated with each other. I have found no mention of this colour variation in *BWP* (vol. 1) or other references.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Eileen C. Rees, Senior Research Officer at Martin Mere, Lancashire, has commented: 'I have indeed seen Whooper Swans with this type of coloration, but usually in late spring rather than autumn. Whooper Swan cygnets that stay at Martin Mere until late March/early April quite frequently gain their white adult plumage before leaving for Iceland, although there is a fair amount of individual variation. The Whoopers are, of course, very difficult to age at this time: we tend to look first for the whitish base to the bill (as described by Darren Hemsley) before checking for greyish flecks/shadowing in the plumage, since the yellow coloration on the bill appears to develop later than the white feathering. We do receive some pale-billed Whooper Swans in autumn, but remain wary of assuming that these are yearlings, since many yearlings gain full adult plumage and bill colour during the summer; I suspect, however, that most *are* young birds which may have developed slowly, perhaps because of ill health or poor food supply. The most interesting aspect of Mr Hemsley's observation is that he thought the birds were a family group. It is very unusual for Whooper Swans to associate with their parents during their second winter. It seems unlikely, however, that cygnets would have gained adult plumage in just 4-5 months, unless they were leucistic. Since we have no further evidence, I suggest that these may have been slow-growing yearlings which may or may not have been related to the adults.'

Red Kites 'playing' with newspaper

On 9th July 1989, at a refuse tip in Almeida de Sayago, Zamora, Spain, I saw two Red Kites *Milvus milvus* chasing another which was carrying a newspaper in its talons. One of the pursuers suddenly snatched the newspaper from its

initial owner, and was then immediately chased by the other two kites, the latter frequently darting towards the ground with sudden turns. The 'game' lasted about five minutes, being over when the kites dropped the newspaper, which fell to the ground. Similar behaviour was observed by Prof. A. Pettet in Sudan, where Black Kites *M. migrans* intercepted airborne paper and polythene sheets and strips (*Brit. Birds* 75: 286).

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Derek Goodwin has commented: 'I think the first carrier suspected food (grease, oil?) in or on the paper and the others reacted, as Black Kites and other raptors often do, to the sight of another bird carrying anything (presuming it to be food?).'

Moorhen preying on nests of Little Grebe and Common Coot

At about 11.50 GMT on 30th May 1994, from a hide overlooking a dyke at College Lake, Buckinghamshire, I watched a Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* come off its nest without covering the three eggs. It did not move far, but, when a Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* soon arrived on the bank opposite, the grebe approached the Moorhen and repeatedly splash-kicked it while calling repeatedly. The Moorhen, however, entered the water and climbed onto the grebe's nest, pecked at one egg and then took another to the bank and ate its contents; I am almost certain that the Moorhen carried the egg between its mandibles (had it used a different method, I would have noted this at the time). The Little Grebe's mate had meanwhile arrived on the scene, but it merely called, as the Moorhen was on the nest. After eating one egg, the Moorhen moved away. One of the grebes returned to the nest, carried the pecked egg off and dropped it in the water.

My attention was then again drawn to the Moorhen, which was heading towards a Common Coot *Fulica atra* on a nest behind some rushes, while another Moorhen approached the nest from the other side of the dyke. Both attacked the coot for over 15 minutes: one would attack, and often the other Moorhen would go to the rescue if the coot was beginning to get the upper hand. Neither made any attempt to get onto the nest while the coot was defending it closely, and at no time did a second coot arrive, despite the noise of the encounter. Eventually, the coot gave up the unequal struggle and moved away down the dyke. Both Moorhens then moved onto the nest; although this was difficult to observe, being mostly hidden behind the vegetation, I did see one Moorhen take an egg and eat its contents. By this time, I could not tell whether or not it was the same individual as that which had eaten the Little Grebe's egg. About half an hour had elapsed since I first started watching the Moorhen approach the grebe's nest.

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Feeding behaviour of Long-tailed Skua outside breeding season

On 9th April 1994, at Ham Green, near Pill, Bristol, Avon, we observed an interesting feeding pattern by an adult Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*. The skua preferred to survey a ploughed field in its characteristic continuously flapping flight, before descending with a falcon-like stoop. During our two-hour observation (14.45-16.45 GMT), the only food we saw taken by the skua while on the ground was earthworms; these were pursued on foot and killed by pecking with the bill. Since there is a paucity of information on the Long-tailed Skua's feeding habits outside the breeding season (*BWP* vol. 3), a further aspect of this individual's behaviour is noteworthy. Upon the onset of rain, the skua took off and proceeded to patrol a nearby section of the River Avon; when drier conditions prevailed, it returned to the arable land that it had previously occupied.

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Sunning behaviour of Pied Wagtails

In view of the scarcity of records of sunning by wagtails *Motacilla* (Simmons 1986, 1994), the following observations of Pied Wagtails *M. alba* are of interest.

At 10.15 GMT on 10th July 1990, a sunny day, I watched a food-carrying female Pied Wagtail approach her nest containing 14-day-old nestlings in a courtyard of the University of Ulster, Co. Antrim. Unusually for this female, she walked towards the nest instead of flying directly to perch by the entrance. At a distance of 1 m from the nest, she stopped on a dead branch, scratched, stretched a wing, shook and fluffed her feathers, looked around and then crouched, wings slightly drooped and mantle feathers raised; her orientation was about 45° to the sun. After sitting in this posture for 3 minutes 50 seconds, she stood up, still with food in her beak, flew to the perch by the nest entrance, and went in. The posture adopted corresponds to 'wings-down' (Simmons 1986). This was the only sunning observed during about 530 hours of observations at and near Pied Wagtail nests.

On 13th August 1994, near Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh, a flock of 21 moulting adult and juvenile Pied Wagtails was feeding on grass and gravel paths. At 11.30 GMT, when the sun appeared briefly during an otherwise cool day, most of them stopped, squatted, fluffed their feathers as in simple sunning, and occasionally preened. One juvenile, just starting body moult, rolled onto its side, lateral to the sun, raised the upper surface of its wing over its back, twisted and fanned its tail so that this was spread on the ground with dorsal side up and turned towards the sun, and fluffed its body feathers. The wagtail remained in this raised-wing posture for about half a minute, then righted itself, fluffed its feathers and preened, before resuming the posture. It repeated the whole procedure twice, before a disturbance alerted it. The weather was subsequently cloudy.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Dr K. E. L. Simmons has commented: 'The first observation is interesting, not only for the description of low-intensity sunning, but also because it shows that parent birds will sometimes take time off to sun themselves, even when feeding young (I have seen this myself in the case of Blackbirds *Turdus merula* and Hedge Accentors *Prunella modularis*, though with both these species the sunning has involved more intense postures). The later observation, however, is of greater importance in that it includes a description of what I have termed (Simmons 1986) the "raised-wing" sunning posture, which, so far as I know, has not been recorded for any wagtail previously and which is shown by relatively few passerines (including Hedge Accentor and Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*).'

Mistle Thrush alighting on and taking off from water

On 19th March 1994, at Colwick Country Park, Nottinghamshire, I saw a Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* fly out low over the lake and quite deliberately alight on the water some 40 m from shore. It sat low in the water in the manner of an auk (Alcidae), remaining quite calm and looking confident in its alien surroundings; it drifted slowly along with the flow of the water and, so far as I could tell, made no attempt to propel itself. A pair of Common Coots *Fulica atra* nearby paid no attention to it. After about two minutes, the thrush suddenly lifted itself clear of the surface and flew back to shore, landing in a tree close to the point from where it had originally flown. It proceeded to preen, shaking its feathers vigorously for several minutes, and a little later it burst into full song. There was ample scope for the bird to bathe in the normal manner along the shallow shoreline.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT This behaviour, presumably an extreme form of bathing, is exceptional. Almost 50 years ago, Georges Olivier described how a Mistle Thrush entered a small forest pool 25-35 cm deep, where it bathed and swam on the surface, using its wings to circle around several times, 'swimming apparently for the fun of it' (*Brit. Birds* 42: 183).

Juvenile Lesser Whitethroat eating cooking fat, peanuts and seeds

On 8th August 1993, at a feeding station at Ladywalk Nature Reserve, Hams Hall, Warwickshire, I noticed a juvenile Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* pecking at cooking fat in a plastic basin; after three pecks, it wiped its bill several times on a branch. Later, I saw two juveniles at nut-holders, clearly swallowing small pieces of peanut; both subsequently appeared on a birdtable, where they pecked at small seeds among the wild-bird food. Over a five-

minute period, this feeding on unexpected items lasted for a total of about one minute. Natural food was readily available.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT This behaviour is not mentioned in *BWP* (vol. 6), but a Lesser Whitethroat was recorded feeding on suet at a Surrey birdtable in August 1980 (*Brit. Birds* 54: 248). Eric Simms (1985, *British Warblers*) mentioned that the species' winter diet may include small seeds.

Juvenile Penduline Tit parasitising another nest

Parasitism among juveniles of the same species has only seldom been recorded, and for very few species: Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* (Johnson & Cowan 1974), House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* (Schifferli 1980) and Tree Sparrows *P. montanus* (Cordero & Sanchez-Aguado 1988).

As part of a long-term study, the adults and nestlings of a breeding population of Penduline Tits *Remiz pendulinus* on the River March in eastern Austria were ringed and breeding attempts monitored. This species builds a domed nest with a tunnel leading to the incubation chamber, and has a complex mating system often involving sequential polygyny and polyandry, with young normally reared by only one adult. On 8th June 1993, we noted a ringed fledgling near a nest in which younger nestlings were being fed by the male. The juvenile had been ringed on 3rd June 1993, when 13 days old, at another nest 300 m away; as young Penduline Tits fledge at about 18-21 days, it must have left its own nest on the same day or shortly before. On 9th June, we made observations at this active nest. During our first observation period (20 minutes), the juvenile entered the nest twice, staying inside for a total of 16 minutes (on one occasion, when it attempted to enter, the male attacked and chased it away): the male arrived six times at the entrance, but could feed his three nestlings only once because the juvenile was sitting in the tunnel; he refused to feed the strange fledgling. During a second period, the fledgling remained three minutes in the nest: the male arrived eight times, feeding his nestlings; he fed the intruder once, but refused to feed it on other occasions, so the juvenile came out and remained near the nest, begging, and was fed again several times when the male arrived at the entrance. In a third observation period, the fledgling spent only 30 seconds in the nest: the male arrived four times, fed his own chicks three times, and fed the ringed young (begging near the nest) once; later, the juvenile followed the adult far from the nest and was fed. The parasitic juvenile thus obtained food in three ways: (i) by entering the nest and competing successfully with the younger chicks; (ii) by begging near the nest and approaching the male when he arrived with food; and (iii) by following the male when he left to forage. On 10th June, the fledgling was not seen near the nest.

The ringed juvenile's less-developed plumage indicated that it was the youngest of its own brood and, therefore, had a lower rank in competition with its siblings. Its parasitic behaviour should pay, because the costs seem rather low (some chases at the beginning) and the benefits are clear. The parasite

increases its competitive ability in relation to the other (younger) nestlings, and therefore receives more food; on the other hand, its own siblings benefit from reduced competition. As the parasitic juvenile finally disappeared from the vicinity of the nest, however, it is unclear if this strategy is less effective over a longer time period.

As pointed out by Romwer & Freeman (1989), species which feed their own young should experience intense selection pressure for effective defence against parasitism, as their reproductive output would be restricted by misdirected parental care. In our observation, the male's refusal to feed the parasitic fledgling appeared to be more costly, as his attempts to feed his own chicks were then interrupted or prevented by the parasite. Aggressive and intense chases might also be risky for his own brood. Misdirected parental care may, therefore, be less costly than avoiding it. For the parasite, this opportunistic behaviour can be considered either as a 'best-of-a-bad-job' strategy or as part of a superior reproductive strategy (Petrie & Møller 1991).

Since we individually colour-ringed the nestlings at only one nest, that in which the parasite fledged, this behaviour may possibly occur more often, but without being noted as such.

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Reaction of female House Sparrow to displaying male

In April 1986, while walking around London Zoo, my attention was drawn to a small flock of squabbling House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*. I photographed a male courting the female at close proximity and on a lower branch. The male displayed vigorously, and the female responded by pulling at his crown feathers. Suddenly she took a firmer hold, and the male then let go of the branch ('submitting') and became suspended by his crown feathers (plates 82-84). The male, in a 'dead' pose, was held in this position for 3-5 seconds, before the two flew off.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Derek Goodwin has commented: 'The less, shall we say, "respectable-seeming" [aspects] of sex and violence in the House Sparrow have been underplayed in many English-language books and papers, but have

▲ ▼ ▶ 82-84. Female House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* holding crown of male House Sparrow (above), which then let go of the branch and submitted (below), and finally hung motionless, suspended by his crown (right), London, April 1986 (*Stephen L. Cooper*)

been more fully described in German publications on *Passer*. . . . Frank Finn, in his *Familiar London Birds*, published by Hutchinson & Co., Paternoster Row, London (undated, but I think early 1920s), recorded this behaviour on page 5: describing the male's display, he continued ". . . only, in many cases, to get soundly pecked for his trouble, for the hen sparrow is a shrewish little wretch; I have even seen her suspend her mate from a bough by the scruff of his neck".' The same behaviour was also recorded about 50 years ago, by Dr G. Beven (*Brit. Birds* 40: 308-310), and Dr K. E. L. Simmons added that he even saw a male 'tossed unceremoniously (still displaying!) right over the female's shoulder by a quick pull of the bill' (*Brit. Birds* 45: 323-325). Rather surprisingly, this aspect of the female House Sparrow's behaviour is not mentioned in *BWP* (vol. 8).

Common Redpolls feeding on algae

On the morning of 5th March 1995, at Park Lime Pits LNR, Walsall, West Midlands, I noticed a party of six Common Redpolls *Carduelis flammea* feeding intensively on greenish algae covering the smooth lower branches of a mature Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. I watched them for several minutes through 10×50 binoculars and approached to within about 6 m without interrupting their activity. A few minute pieces of algae were seen to fall to the ground as the birds fed. The finches were not attracted to the trunk of the tree or to other branches where crevices may have held insects. According to the literature, feeding on algae or lichen has also been recorded for Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*, Coal *Parus ater* and Blue Tits *P. caeruleus* and House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (*Brit. Birds* 80: 169; 81: 239-240; 82: 447-448; 85: 381). As this activity can easily be overlooked, it may be more widespread than imagined, and, in view of the considerable amount of nourishment birds may derive from algae (*Brit. Birds* 85: 381), it could prove to be a valuable resource for some small passerines when other winter food is in short supply.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT Derek Goodwin has commented: 'I may have seen this but not positively identified the green algae as being eaten, as I have when seeing Long-tailed Tits feeding on it. My Redpoll notes of 27th March 1982 read: "Many Redpolls . . . were taking some very small objects from trunks & boughs of Ash trees. The birds often clinging, with tails pressed for support like woodpeckers as they took tiny objects from crevices in the bark. The bark mostly had a coating of green algae, and sometimes the birds pecked from the outer surface of the bark but most that we got a clear view of took the (to us invisible) food from narrow vertical crevices in the bark." I noted seeing this behaviour again on 11th April, and as having seen it several times and only on Ash trees (and not on birch trees *Betula*, from which aphids were being taken from the buds).'

EUROPEAN NEWS

All records have been accepted by the relevant national rarities committee, unless marked by an asterisk(*).

Records are included only if they have been sent by the official national representative, each of whom is listed at the end of this report, or have been published in the relevant national journal (these sources are always acknowledged).

As well as covering the whole of Europe, records notified by the national representatives for adjacent countries within the Western Palearctic are also included.

This forty-third six-monthly report includes officially notified records from 33 countries.

These summaries aim to include *all* records of: (1) significant breeding-range expansions or contractions; (2) major irruptions of erupting species; (3) Asiatic vagrants; (4) Nearctic species (excluding ducks, waders and gulls in Great Britain and Ireland, where they are regular); (5) other extralimital vagrants; and (6) major national rarities, including the first five national records even if the species is common elsewhere in Europe.

Unless otherwise stated, all records refer to nationally accepted records of single individuals.

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*
NETHERLANDS Second record: Vlaardingen, Zuid-Holland, on 1st-10th January 1998.

Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris*
IRELAND Vagrants: adult or subadult about 3 km southwest of Cape Clear, Co. Cork, on 9th September 1995, and adult off Cape Clear Island on 22nd August 1996 (*Irish Birds* 6: 64).

Albatross *Diomedea*
IRELAND Vagrant: 8 km southeast of Cape Clear, Co. Cork, on 8th July 1988 (*Irish Birds* 6: 64).

Madeira/Cape Verde Petrel *Pterodroma madeira/feae*
IRELAND Vagrants: Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 5th September 1974 (*Irish Bird Report* 23: 6); Old Head of Kinsale, Co. Cork, on 14th August 1989 (*Irish Birds* 4: 575); Cape Clear Island on 26th August 1990 (*Irish Birds* 4: 574); St John's Point, Co. Down, on 20th August 1991 (*Irish Birds* 4: 574); Cape Clear Island on 11th August 1993 (*Irish Birds* 5: 328); two, within 25 minutes of each other, Mizen Head, Co. Cork, on 24th August 1994, perhaps only one individual (*Irish Birds* 5: 328); Kerry Head, Co. Kerry, on 26th August 1995, probably same individual as that at Brandon Point, Co. Kerry, on same date (*Irish Birds* 5: 449); Cape Clear Island on 22nd August 1996; and St John's Point, Co. Down, on 22nd August 1996 (*Irish Birds* 6: 65).

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*
LATVIA Second record: on 13th November 1995 (not third record as noted *Brit. Birds* 89: 247, since June 1994 record, *Brit. Birds* 88: 26, now rejected; *Putni dabā* 7 (2) 28-31).

Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*
POLAND First record: off Krynica, Morska, Gdansk Bay, on 5th October 1997.

White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina*
MOROCCO Fifth record: off Agadir on 31st March 1997* (previous records were during 1950s and 1960s).

Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*
DENMARK Highest-ever count: 243 at Blåvands Huk, W-Jutland, on 17th September 1997.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
ITALY Increase: 472 breeding pairs at six sites in 1996 (cf. only two sites with about 50 pairs in 1986, *Riv. Ital. Orn.* 56: 127-129; *Avocetta* 20: 86).

Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*
GREECE Highest-ever number: peak of 27,000 at Evros Delta on 22nd November 1996.

Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*
ISRAEL First West Palearctic record: Eilat on 1st December 1997.

Frigatebird *Fregata*
FRANCE Vagrant: Camargue on 7th September 1991 (*Ornithos* 4: 143).
IRELAND Fourth record: female or immature at Booterstown, Co. Dublin, on 22nd June 1995 (*Irish Birds* 6: 66).

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
POLAND Third record: on Oder River, near Gryfino, on 13th August 1997.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
IRELAND First breeding record: 12 pairs raised 24 young at one site in Co. Cork in 1997 (*Irish Birds* 6: 107-108).

Great White Egret *Egretta alba*
ITALY Increase: 23-27 pairs breeding in 1997 at five sites (cf. first breeding record, of one pair in 1993, *Brit. Birds* 87: 312; *Avocetta* 20: 86).
LATVIA Hybridisation with Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: instance reported (*Brit. Birds* 91: 39, plate 4) documented in detail (*Putni dabā* 7(2): 1-7).

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*
FRANCE First record: Ouessant on 11th-27th April 1996 (not 11th-26th as noted *Brit. Birds* 90: 80; *Ornithos* 4: 143).

Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita*
MOROCCO Unexplained decline: about 50 individuals fewer in 1997 than in 1996; frustratingly, analyses have failed to identify why the birds died; viruses and all likely pesticides have been ruled out, leaving botulism or obscure toxins as the main possibilities (*World Birdwatch* 19(4): 3).

Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*
CANARY ISLANDS Amendment: recent second to fourth records (*Brit. Birds* 89: 248; 91: 40) are now known to relate to escapes from a zoological centre on Fuerteventura; in December 1997, there were six escaped individuals in the area.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*
GREAT BRITAIN Population increase: counts for the Wetland Bird Survey suggest a 50% increase in the resident naturalised population between 1990 (when 19,501 were counted in a summer survey) and 1995/96.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*
BULGARIA Second record: adult at Shabla Tuzla, Dobrich district, on 5th May 1997 (*Branta* 1997(2): 14).

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*
BULGARIA First record: Durankulak Lake, Dobrich district, on 25th February 1997 (record on 15th March 1997, *Brit. Birds* 91: 40, now becomes second, though perhaps same individual; *Branta* 1997(2): 14).

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*
DENMARK Fourth record of race *nigricans*: record on 21st-22nd December 1995, *Brit. Birds* 90: 81, becomes fourth, not third, following two in 1983 and one in 1992 (*DOFT* 91: 137).

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*
SWITZERLAND Massive increase in number of observations and flock sizes in recent years: in 1997, 731 reports from 56 localities, including at least 59 at Klingnau reservoir on 27th November and 28 at Flachsee/Unterlunkhofen on 29th November; four pairs bred in 1997, plus mixed pair of Ruddy × Cape Shelduck *T. cana*.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
ITALY Increase: 72-89 pairs breeding in 1995 at 15 sites (cf. 10-20 pairs at two to three sites in early 1980s; *Riv. Ital. Orn.* 67: 85-94).
UKRAINE First breeding record in Western Ukraine: pair reared seven young at Cholhyni, Javoriv district, L'vov region, in July-August 1996.

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*
SWITZERLAND Fifth breeding record: female with at least one chick on 16th August 1997.

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*
UKRAINE Deletion: record noted *Brit. Birds* 91: 40 related to Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*.

American Wigeon *Anas americana*
FRANCE Vagrant: 15th-21st December 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 144).

Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*
FRANCE Vagrant: October 1995 to May 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 144).

Common Teal *Anas crecca*
AUSTRIA Second record of Nearctic race *carolinensis*: 30th November 1991 (*Egretta* 40: 10).

DENMARK Vagrants of race *carolinensis*: 15th-18th April 1995, 16th-17th April 1996, 23rd April 1996 and 27th April 1996 (*DOFT* 91: 138).
FRANCE Vagrants of race *carolinensis*: male from 14th January to 28th April 1995, and male on 13th-23rd November 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 144).

Black Duck *Anas rubripes*
FRANCE Third record: 2nd-4th January 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 145).

Garganey *Anas querquedula*
DENMARK Highest-ever count: 246 at Vejlerne, N-Jutland, on 26th August 1997.

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*
DENMARK Vagrants: 25th August 1972 and 7th May 1995 (seven previously accepted records; *DOFT* 91: 138).
FRANCE Vagrants: 14th April 1995, 9th May 1996, 5th June 1996, 21st June 1996 and 13th October 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 145).

Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris*
SPAIN First breeding record in the Balearics: at least two pairs, one with young, at Albufera Lake, Mallorca, in 1997 (*Ardeola* 44: 247).

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*
FRANCE Vagrants: male on 12th November 1995 and five records involving four males in January and October-December 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 145).
SWITZERLAND Escape: female at Flüelen on 9th, 13th & 15th August 1997, accepted in Category E.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*
BULGARIA Census: 150-210 pairs (*BSPB National Census Project: final report 1997*).

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*
FRANCE Second occurrence: two records involving one male in 1996 considered to be same individual as in 1992 and 1993 (*Brit. Birds* 89: 250), and female on 19th March to 4th April 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 145).
IRELAND Second record: adult male on Lough Gill, Co. Kerry, on 19th-24th March 1996 (first record in Tyrone in 1995, *Irish Birds* 5: 454, regarded as same as that recorded in Northern Ireland in previous years, *Northern Ireland Bird Report* (1995): 29; *Irish Birds* 6: 69).
SWITZERLAND Vagrant/escape: adult male at Vevey on various dates from 7th February to 25th March 1997, and on 10th December 1997*.

Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri*
FAROE ISLANDS Second record: immature male at Sandøy on 29th June 1996.

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*
DENMARK Vagrants: 13th May 1995 and 7th June 1996 (12 previous records; *DOFT* 91: 138).
FRANCE Vagrant: 2nd April 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 146).
GERMANY Third record: three males with 10,000 Common *M. nigra* and 60 Velvet Scoters *M. fusca* at Westerheversand, Nordfriesland, Schleswig-Holstein, on 20th December 1995, and at least one on 24th December (previous records in October 1851 and March 1970; these details replace those in *Brit. Birds* 91: 42; *Limicola* 11: 301-305).

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*
DENMARK First record: female at Bognæs, Roskilde Fjord, on 18th June 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 138).

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*
AUSTRIA First record: female at River Fischa, near Fischamend, Lower Austria, from 19th January to 16th February 1997 (included in Category C).
FRANCE Record numbers: 23 records involving 72 individuals in 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 146).
HUNGARY First record: adult male on Hortobágy on 2nd March 1997.

Swallow-tailed Kite *Elanoides forficatus*
CANARY ISLANDS First West Palearctic record: adult on Fuerteventura on 19th-23rd March 1993* (plates 85 & 86, on page 244).

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*
FRANCE Highest-ever breeding numbers: in 1996, four pairs, of which one had broods of two, three and four young, one had two broods, but numbers not known, and the other two produced no young (*Ornithos* 4: 146).

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
IRELAND First record: near Garryvoe and Ballycotton, Co. Cork, from 20th April to 13th May 1980, previously rejected, now accepted (there have been five subsequent records; *Irish Birds* 6: 71).

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*
LUXEMBOURG Range expansion: 46 territories in 1997, with range expansion in north (12-24 territories in 1972-80).

▲▼ 85 & 86. Swallow-tailed Kite *Elanoides forficatus*, Fuerteventura, Canary Islands, March 1993 (*H. Müller*). See page 243.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*
BELGIUM Second record: 15th May 1994 (*Aves* 34: 78).

Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*
BELARUS Fourth record since 1924: Cherven district, Minsk region, on 19th May 1996.
ITALY Increase: 42 pairs breeding in 1996 in Sardinia (cf. 21 in 1986; *Avocetta* 21: 15).

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*
BELARUS Second record since 1940s: adult male near Visokoye, Kamenets district, Brest region, in August 1994.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
DENMARK Fourth record of race *vulpinus*: Skagen, N-Jutland, on 7th & 10th June 1996 (*DOFT* 91: 139).

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
AUSTRIA Status: now regular on plains of eastern Austria, with 15 records involving 14 individuals in 1991-95 (*Egretta* 40: 11).
BELARUS First record: male in Kamenets district, Brest region, on 1st August 1996.
DENMARK Vagrant: juvenile at Blåvands Huk, W-Jutland, on 12th-15th August 1996

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(five previous records; *DOFT* 91: 139).
FRANCE Vagrant: Camargue on 8th November 1995 (*Ornithos* 4: 147).

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*
FINLAND Fourth record: two third-years at Kuusamo, northeastern Finland, on 9th June 1996.
FRANCE Fourth record: Camargue on 10th-24th May 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 148).

Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus*
DENMARK First and third records: September 1957 and 2nd May 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 139).
SLOVENIA First record: Predjamski grad on 16th June 1997 (*Acrocephalus* 18: 98-99).

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*
DENMARK Fifth record: 8th June 1996 (record on 14th August 1996, *Brit. Birds* 90: 241, becomes sixth; *DOFT* 91: 139).
ITALY Increase: 320 pairs breeding in 1996 in Sardinia (cf. 255-315 pairs in 1985; *Avocetta* 21: 14).

Corn Crake *Crex crex*
LATVIA Census: 26,000-38,000 singing males in 1996 (*Calidris* 26: 41).

Purple Swamp-hen *Porphyrio porphyrio*
ITALY Increase: 450-600 pairs breeding in 1997 in Sardinia (cf. 190-280 pairs in mid 1970s; *Avocetta* 21: 35).

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*
ITALY Increase: 63 pairs breeding in 1996 (cf. 36 pairs in 1991; *Avocetta* 21: 147).

Senegal Thick-knee *Burhinus senegalensis*
MOROCCO First record: heard calling from top of building at Loyoune on 17th February 1997*.

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*
AUSTRIA Second record: 25th September 1991 (*Egretta* 40: 17).

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*
ICELAND First record: on ship just east of Iceland in first week of June 1997*.

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*
NETHERLANDS First record: Workumerwaard, Nijefurd, Friesland, on 1st-5th August 1997*.

Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*
FRANCE Vagrant: 3rd May 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 150).
UKRAINE Fifth record: Yavoriv district, L'vov region, on 28th August 1997.

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*
CYPRUS First record: report of Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus* at Akrotiri on 9th April 1958 has now been reassessed and has been accepted as the first record of Kittlitz's Plover in Cyprus (records of two on 10th-20th November 1991 and singles on 4th January 1993, and 10th & 12th March 1995—*Brit. Birds* 86: 40; 87: 6; 91: 44—become second to fourth).

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*
FRANCE First record: Vendée on 21st-22nd July 1995 (*Ornithos* 4: 150).

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*
CYPRUS Amendment: records in July 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 91: 44) referred to a pair in breeding plumage and a single in breeding plumage, not to reports of breeding.
FINLAND Fourth record: Korppoo, southwestern Finland, on 22nd June 1996.
HUNGARY Second record: 24th-25th May 1997 (*Túzok* 2: 111-112).

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*
DENMARK First and second records: Bygholm Vejle on 19th August 1991 and Neksø Sydstrand on 24th August 1996 (*DOFT* 91: 140).
FRANCE Vagrant: 3rd October 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 150).

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*
CANARY ISLANDS First record: juvenile and adult on Fuerteventura in November 1997*.
DENMARK Fourth to sixth records: 7th September 1994, 3rd October 1995 and 26th July 1996 (*DOFT* 91: 140).

American/Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica/fulva*
DENMARK Vagrant: 31st July 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 140).

Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*
CZECH REPUBLIC Vagrant: near Lanžhot, southern Moravia, on 25th April 1997 (six previous records).
FRANCE Vagrant: 22nd November 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 150).
POLAND Vagrants: Cocz on 15th August 1997 and Otmuchowski Reservoir on 16th November 1997 (with April and August records noted *Brit. Birds* 91: 45, total of four individuals in 1997).

White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*
BULGARIA Second record: adult at Poda

Lagoon, near Burgas, on 13th May 1997 (*Neophron* 1997(2): 4).
FINLAND Third record: Parikkala, southeastern Finland, on 11th May 1997.
HUNGARY Third record: adult near Csere-bökény on 25th September 1997.
POLAND Second record: adult at Biebrza Marshes on 15th May 1997 (record on 18th May 1997, *Brit. Birds* 91: 45, becomes third).
SWEDEN Second to fifth records: adults at Turkiesjön, Västmanland, on 22nd-24th June 1997*, at Osten, Västergötland, on 26th June 1997*, at Rynningeviken, Närke, from 27th June to 6th July 1997*, and at Getterön, Halland, on 10th-14th July 1997* (probably only two individuals involved).

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*
NETHERLANDS Third to fifth records: Texel, Noord-Holland, on 16th July 1997; Lepelaarsplassen, Almere, Flevoland, on 16th-26th July 1997; Den Helder, Noord-Holland, on 3rd August 1997.

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*
IRELAND Second record: adult at The Cull, Co. Wexford, on 20th-21st August 1996 (*Irish Birds* 6: 73).

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*
FINLAND Second record: Uusikaupunki, southwestern Finland, on 12th July 1997.

Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*
IRELAND First record: Ballycotton, Co. Cork, on 15th-16th June 1996 (*Irish Birds* 6: 73).

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*
BELGIUM First record: adult in Gent on 3rd August 1996 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 217-221).

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
FRANCE Vagrants: three in 1996, one in August and two in October (*Ornithos* 4: 150).
HUNGARY First record: first-summer in Bács-Kiskun on 18th-24th May 1997 (*Tüzok* 2: 102-105).

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*
FRANCE Vagrants: five in 1996, in January-February, March, July-August and two in September (*Ornithos* 4: 150-151).

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*
AUSTRIA Vagrants: 11th-16th September 1990, 20th-30th April 1991 and 18th September 1994 (*Egretta* 40: 14).
CZECH REPUBLIC Vagrants: near Záhliniec, central Moravia, on 27th-29th April 1997, and near Bzenec, southern Moravia, on 12th October 1997 (five previous records).
DENMARK Vagrants: 4th May 1995 and 12th-13th May 1996 (21 previous records; *DOFT* 91: 140).
FRANCE Vagrants: nine records involving ten individuals in 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 151).
POLAND Vagrants: Gdansk on 18th August 1997 and two at Spytkowice on 19th November 1997.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*
DENMARK Third record: 1st October 1996 (*DOFT* 91: 140).
IRELAND Second record: adult in summer plumage at Tacumshin, Co. Wexford, on 14th-15th September 1997*.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*
CZECH REPUBLIC First record: near Bzenec, southern Moravia, on 4th October 1997.
LATVIA Fifth record: two juveniles in Pape, Liepāja, on 7th-9th October 1997*.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*
DENMARK Vagrants: 15th-28th August 1995, 17th-21st May 1996, 17th May 1996 and 25th August 1996 (nine previous records; *DOFT* 91: 140-141).
FRANCE Vagrants: five records in 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 151).

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*
IRELAND First record of Nearctic race *delicata*: juvenile near Coleraine, Co. Londonderry, on 28th October 1991 (*Irish Birds* 6: 75).

Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala*
ISRAEL First West Palearctic record: Hula Valley from 28th February to 4th March 1998.

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*
DENMARK Vagrants: 13th September 1995 and 5th-6th & 18th May 1996 (five previous records; *DOFT* 91: 141).

Long-billed/Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus/griseus*
DENMARK Vagrant: 23rd April 1996 (*DOFT* 91: 141).

Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*
FRANCE Deletion: record of 7th April 1988 (*Brit. Birds* 82: 18) now no longer accepted (*Ornithos* 4: 152).
GREECE Three records in 1996: Evros Delta on 1st-3rd April and two on 13th April, and Porto Lagos on 27th June.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
GREAT BRITAIN New population estimate: about 1,080 breeding territories were occupied in 1997 (*Bird Study* 44: 290-302).

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*
FRANCE Fifth record: 2nd January 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 152).

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*
FRANCE Vagrants: 27th May 1996 and 7th-28th October 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 152).

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
FAROE ISLANDS Second record: Nólsoy on 15th September 1996.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*
IRELAND First record: adult at Rosslare Backstrand, Co. Wexford, on 24th-26th September 1996 (*Irish Birds* 6: 75).

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia*
FRANCE Vagrant: 13th May 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 152).

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*
FRANCE Vagrant: 15th October 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 152). Deletion: record of 24th-27th May 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 243) now no longer accepted (*Ornithos* 4: 152).
ICELAND Fourth record: Miðnes, Gull., on 21st-26th September 1997*.

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*
LATVIA First record: juvenile in Pape, Liepāja, on 3rd October 1997*.

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*
CYPRUS First record: two sub-adults in Akrotiri Bay on 19th July 1994.

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*
DENMARK Correction: total of 737 in 1995, *Brit. Birds* 91: 47, related to Great Skua *Catharacta skua*, not Long-tailed (*DOFT* 91: 27).

Great Skua *Catharacta skua*
DENMARK Highest-ever numbers: total of 737 in 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 27).

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*
AUSTRIA First record: 30th September to 2nd October 1992 (*Brit. Birds* 86: 283; *Egretta* 40: 19).
FRANCE First record: second-winter at Capitello, Corse du Sud, on 3rd November 1997*.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*
ITALY Increase: 2,173-2,374 pairs breeding in 1996 at four sites (cf. 145-1,580 in 1983-90 at one or two sites; *Avocetta* 21: 86).

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*
DENMARK Fourth and fifth records: 1st-18th July 1995 and 12th-16th May 1996 (not 12th-18th May as given *Brit. Birds* 90: 86; *DOFT* 91: 141-142).
FRANCE Vagrant: 13th November 1996.
NETHERLANDS First record: adult, centre of Groningen, from 22nd August to 18th October 1997.

Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*
FINLAND First record: adult at Oulu on 31st May 1997.
FRANCE Vagrant: 22nd-26th November 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 153).
ICELAND Third record: Suðursveit, A-Skaft., on 19th June 1997*.
IRELAND Second record: adult at Clogher Head, Co. Louth, on 17th-18th August 1997.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*
IRELAND Largest-ever counts: at least 750 in Wicklow Harbour, Co. Wicklow, on 1st January 1998, rising to 850 on 3rd January 1998.

Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*
AUSTRIA Second record: 2nd September 1995 (*Egretta* 40: 19).
DENMARK Best-ever autumn numbers: about 500 in autumn 1997 (previous best was 187 in 1987).
SWEDEN Exceptional invasion along west coast in mid September 1997: first were on 8th*, then more than 100 on 9th* to early October, including at least two inland, at Orsa, Dalarna, on 14th*, and Jönköping, Småland, on 15th*; numbers remained much higher than normal to end of year, but not in flocks after early October.

Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*
DENMARK Second record: 7th November to 3rd December 1995 (not 6th November to 4th December as given in *Brit. Birds* 89: 257, 90: 86; *DOFT* 91: 142).

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*
AUSTRIA Second record: 20th-21st May 1993 (*Egretta* 40: 19).

Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*
GERMANY First record: adult following ship in North Sea from 15.2 km off St Peter, Nordfriesland, Schleswig-Holstein, to 22.8 km east of Heligoland on 16th July 1997 (*Limicola* 11: 281-285).
SPAIN Population increase continuing: about 17,000 pairs in 1997, with 11,600 at Ebro delta, 2,700 at the Chafarinas islands, 1,650

in the Balearics, 400 at Grosa island and 100 at Alborán island (*Quercus* 142: 10). SWITZERLAND Confirmation: first and second records, in 1956 and 1983, confirmed as accepted.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*
AUSTRIA First to third records (two individuals): adult in Vorarlberg on 7th April (not 8th April as given in *Brit. Birds* 87: 8) to 9th May and 19th-22nd May 1993 and, the same individual, on 26th March to 19th May 1994, and immature in Oberösterreich on 13th October 1994 (*Egretta* 40: 19).
FRANCE Vagrants: 15 records involving seven individuals in 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 153-154).

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*
IRELAND Vagrants of Nearctic race *smithsonianus*: second-winter at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, from 31st August to 1st September 1997; first-winter at Whitehouse, Co. Antrim, on 27th December 1997; second-winter at Clogher Head, Co. Louth, on 27th December 1997 (Cork and Louth records are first of birds in plumage other than first-winter; Ballycotton individual is first outside period November-April; *Irish Birds* 6: 80).

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans*
ITALY First record of nominate race: subadult at Tavullia, near Pesaro, on 11th February 1997 (*Riv. Ital. Orn.* 67: 106-107).
SLOVENIA First record of nominate race: found dead at Ptujsko jezero on 3rd December 1994 (*Acrocephalus* 18: 167).

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*
BELARUS Correction: record on 26th June 1997, *Brit. Birds* 91: 48, was ninth since 1980s (not third since 1960s).

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*
FRANCE Vagrants: Camargue on 30th July to 10th August 1996 and Seine-Maritime on 24th August 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 154).
IRELAND First record: adult at Ballycotton, Co. Cork, on 7th-8th August 1996 (perhaps same individual as that on Tresco, Scilly, on 2nd-4th August 1996, *Brit. Birds* 90: 487; *Irish Birds* 6: 81).

Elegant Tern *Sterna elegans*
FRANCE Vagrants: three records, but no new individuals, in 1996: Banc d'Arguin, Gironde, in spring, also in Finistère from 29th June to 20th July and in Vendée from 5th August to 1st September; additional 1995 records: Finistère from 20th June to 25th July and Loire-Atlantique on 26th August (*Ornithos* 4: 154).

Sooty/Bridled Tern *Sterna fuscata/anaethetus*
FRANCE Amendments: two records previously accepted at species level (*Alauda* 54: 41; *Ornithos* 2: 158; *Brit. Birds* 89: 257) are now accepted as indeterminate: Manche on 29th July 1984 and Loire-Atlantique on 20th August 1994 (*Ornithos* 4: 155).

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*
IRELAND Largest-ever flock: minimum of 120 including flock of 111 at North Slob, Co. Wexford, on 6th August 1997, with 85 still present on 7th.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
DENMARK Influx: about 2,000 during 13th-16th May 1997 (cf. only 47 records up to 1994). First breeding records: 16-18 pairs at Tondermarsken in Jutland and one pair at Vestermager near Copenhagen, but all were unsuccessful (*DOFT* 91: 121-124).
ICELAND Fourth and fifth records: Fljótshlið, Rang., on 12th June 1997*, and Flatey à Skjálfanda, S-ping., on 2nd-3rd August 1997*.
ITALY Increase: 20-23 breeding pairs in 1996 (cf. 0-2 in 1993; *Avocetta* 20: 86).
SWEDEN Unprecedented influx: total of 2,500 on 13th-15th May 1997*, with largest flocks of 250 at Krankesjön, Skåne, on 13th*, 370 at Ringsjön, Skåne, on 14th*, 124 at Skottorp, Halland, on 14th* and 200 at Skatelövsfjorden, Småland, on 14th*; about 50 on 16th-21st* (total previous records, since 1834, only about 100).

Razorbill *Alca torda*
GREECE First record: two in Laconian Gulf on 6th January 1997.

Little Auk *Alle alle*
AUSTRIA First record: Vienna on 4th November 1995 (*Egretta* 40: 22).

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*
AUSTRIA First record: Vorarlberg on 23rd September 1995 (*Egretta* 40: 22).

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*
CANARY ISLANDS First record: pair on Fuerteventura in January 1998*.

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*
BULGARIA First record: flock of four flying south along coast on 26th October 1996 (*Acrocephalus* 18: 111-112).

Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus*
SWITZERLAND First breeding record: feral pair bred successfully in 1997.

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*
DENMARK Fifth record: 4th May 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 142).

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*
DENMARK Irruption: minimum of 216 between September 1990 and July 1991 (*DOFT* 91: 59-62).

Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*
DENMARK Re-establishment: one pair in 1984, increasing to an estimated population of 25-30 pairs in 1996 (*DOFT* 91: 63-68).

Great Grey Owl *Strix nebulosa*
SLOVENIA First record (perhaps escape): 14th January 1995 (*Acrocephalus* 18: 154).

Tengmalm's Owl *Aegolius funereus*
HUNGARY First breeding records: two single pairs, each nesting in holes in Beech trees *Fagus sylvatica*, 4 km apart in Zemplén Hills in April-May 1997 (*Túzok* 2: 106-108).

Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*
CANARY ISLANDS First record: Tenerife in October 1997*.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*
SLOVENIA First record: 1st April 1994 (*Acrocephalus* 18: 154).

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*
FRANCE Population increasing: spectacular increase in numbers since colonisation of Val d'Allier and middle Val de Loire area in 1989, with 239 breeding pairs in 1996 (*Nos Oiseaux* 44: 205-210).

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
SWITZERLAND Recovery: after a 20-30 year absence, at least nine breeding pairs, principally in French-speaking plateau region, in 1997 (*Nos Oiseaux* 45: 29-34).

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
LATVIA Invasion: total of at least 1,000 in Pape, Liepāja, during 10th August to 27th October 1997*.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos medius*
NETHERLANDS First breeding records since 1962: 13 territories, with at least seven young fledging from three nests, in central and southern Limburg in 1997* (these details replace those given *Brit. Birds* 91: 49).

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
ICELAND Third record: on boat just south of southeast Iceland on 17th November 1997*.

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*
SLOVENIA First record: three on 23rd September 1994 (*Acrocephalus* 18: 155).

Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola*
FRANCE First European record: Mas Thibert, Bouches-du-Rhône, on 25th September 1997.

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
BELGIUM Second record: 4th-9th May 1994 (report on 19th-28th April 1989, *Brit. Birds* 83: 14, not accepted; *Aves* 34: 83).

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*
AUSTRIA Vagrants: April 1992, May 1992, May 1993 (two), October 1994 (five) and October 1995 (*Egretta* 40: 24).
FRANCE Vagrants: Camargue on 29th November 1995, and 11 in 1996, one in May, seven in September or October, one in Lot-et-Garonne from 15th November to 3rd March 1997, one in Somme from 24th November to 23rd December and one in Bouches-du-Rhône on 28th December (*Ornithos* 4: 156).

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*
FRANCE First record: one with Richard's Pipit *A. novaeseelandiae* at Crau, Bouches-du-Rhône, from 17th January to at least end of February 1998*.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
FRANCE Vagrant: Ouessant on 21st October 1996 (five previous records; *Ornithos* 4: 156).

Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi*
IRELAND First record: Garinish, Firkeet, Co. Cork, on 27th-28th September 1990 (originally submitted as Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus*; *Irish Birds* 6: 83).

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*
IRELAND Second to fifth records of race *littoralis*: St John's Point, Co. Down, on 27th March 1996; Briggs Rocks, Belfast Lough, Co. Down, on 2nd-3rd April 1996; Sherkin Island, Co. Cork, on 1st April 1996; Blackrock Strand, Co. Kerry, on 5th May 1996 (first was at Tory Island, Co. Donegal, on 4th April 1961, *Irish Bird Report* 9: 24; *Irish Birds* 6: 83).

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
DENMARK First record of race *feldegg*: two

males at Udholm Mose, N-Jutland, on 3rd April 1988 (records in 1989 and 1992, *Brit. Birds* 87: 10, 88: 38, become second and third; *DOFT* 91: 144).

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
AUSTRIA Vagrants: April 1992, May 1993, May 1995 (three) and September 1995 (*Egretta* 40: 25-26). Small influx: at least six, all males, in spring 1997.
CROATIA First and second records: pair ringed at Lake Vransko jezero, Dalmacija, on 1st-3rd May 1997 and another female ringed on 3rd May 1997; juvenile trapped and ringed there on 9th August 1997.
FINLAND Hybridisation with black-headed Yellow Wagtail *M. flava feldegg*: female paired with male *feldegg* successfully reared brood in southwestern Finland in May-July 1997 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 287-290).
SWITZERLAND First breeding record: near Rothenthurm/Schwyz, male from 11th June and pair from 14th June 1997, clutch hatched on 29th or 30th June, but nestlings taken by predator, probably Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 347-352).

Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis*
SWEDEN Second record: juvenile at Eckelsudde, Öland, on 26th October 1997*.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*
CZECH REPUBLIC Fourth breeding record: mixed pair—female *L. luscinia* with male Rufous Nightingale *L. megarhynchos*—near Josefov, eastern Bohemia, on 29th May to 1st June 1997.

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*
DENMARK Second record: Christiansø from 30th October to 2nd November 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 144).

Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus auroreus*
SWEDEN First record (probable escape): Örebro, Närke, on 22nd-26th September 1997*.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*
AUSTRIA Second record of race *maura*: male near Gaming, Lower Austria, on 29th March 1997.
DENMARK Vagrants of race *maura/stejnegeri*: 15th October 1995, 24th-26th September 1996 and 19th October 1996 (*DOFT* 91: 144).
FRANCE Vagrant of race *maura/stejnegeri*: 13th September 1995 (*Ornithos* 4: 157).

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*
POLAND Second record: near Zywiec on 3rd August 1997. (previous record was in May 1986, *Brit. Birds* 80: 327).

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*
POLAND Third record: female/immature at Skowronki, Gdansk Bay, on 12th September 1997.

Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica*
DENMARK Second record: 30th June to 18th August 1996 (*DOFT* 91: 144).

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*
DENMARK Third record: 25th-26th November 1995 (not 23rd-26th November as given *Brit. Birds* 89: 261; *DOFT* 91: 144).
FRANCE Vagrant: 8th June 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 157).
IRELAND Fourth record: male at Rosslare Harbour, Co. Wexford, on 2nd-13th December 1997*.
POLAND First and second records: immature males at Jastarnia, Hel Peninsula, on 23rd October 1997, and at Darlowo, Baltic coast, on 29th October 1997.

Siberian Thrush *Zoothera sibirica*
SWITZERLAND Confirmation: 8th December 1978 record (*Brit. Birds* 72: 592) confirmed as accepted in Category A.

Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis*
AUSTRIA Vagrants: two records of black-throated race *atrogularis*, involving eight individuals, two in Salzburg on 1st January 1993 and two to six in Steiermark during 22nd-26th December 1993 (*Egretta* 40: 27).
NETHERLANDS Third record: first-winter female of black-throated race *atrogularis* from 4th January to 24th March 1996 (dates amend those given in *Brit. Birds* 89: 261; *Dutch Birding* 19: 269-272).

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*
AUSTRIA Probable breeding: two during 15th August to 15th September 1995 suspected of breeding in Vorarlberg; also one at Sandeck, Burgenland, on 2nd August 1994, the first record away from the Rhine Delta (*Egretta* 40: 27).

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*
FAROE ISLANDS Second record: ringed on Nólsoy on 2nd May 1997.

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*
FRANCE Vagrants: 15th September 1996 and 16th September 1996 (eight previous records; *Ornithos* 4: 157).

SLOVENIA Fifth record: Ljubljansko barje on 17th September 1997.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
ICELAND First record: Halt í Suðursveit, A-Skaft., on 23rd November 1997*.
NETHERLANDS Second record: singing male from 20th June to 1st July 1997 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 273-276).
SLOVENIA Second to fourth records: 21st September 1995, 20th September 1996 and 21st September 1996 (*Acrocephalus* 18: 103-106).

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*
GREAT BRITAIN First breeding in Scotland: pair reared three young in Orkney in 1993 (*Scot. Birds* 19: 170-171).
IRELAND Second record: male singing at Tacumshin, Co. Wexford, on 22nd-23rd June 1996 (*Irish Birds* 6: 85).

Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*
SWEDEN Second record: one ringed at Getterön, Halland, on 6th July 1997*.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*
FAROE ISLANDS Third and fourth records: 24th May 1996 and 15th August 1996, both ringed on Nólsoy.

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
AUSTRIA Third to fifth records: 31st May 1991, 9th-26th June 1991 and 13th May to 10th June 1992 (*Egretta* 40: 28).

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*
NETHERLANDS Second and third records: 26th November to 3rd December 1995 and 3rd-7th January 1997 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 221-224).

Rüppell's Warbler *Sylvia rueppelli*
FRANCE Second record: male singing in Camargue on 20th May 1996 (first was on 20th March 1970; *Ornithos* 4: 157).

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
MALTA Fourth record: one ringed in October 1997.

Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*
FRANCE Vagrants: four in October-November 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 157).
LATVIA Vagrants: two, on 7th and 11th October 1997*.
SWEDEN Major irruption for second consecutive year: about 280 observed (but total numbers involved must have been at the very least several thousand) in 1996 irruption; very preliminary figure of 70+ in 1997 may increase when all reports received.

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*
FRANCE Vagrants: 45 records relating to 47 individuals during September-December 1996, all but eight in Finistère (*Ornithos* 4: 157-158).
SLOVENIA First to fourth records: 2nd October 1991, 13th October 1996, 10th October 1997 and 19th October 1997 (*Acrocephalus* 18: 148-150).

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*
FRANCE Vagrant: 17th January to 23rd February 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 158).

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
FRANCE Fourth record: Ouessant on 26th October 1996 (reports on 9th November 1994 and 28th October 1995, *Brit. Birds* 89: 262, were not accepted; *Ornithos* 4: 158).

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
FRANCE Vagrants: 9th November 1994, 12th-17th October 1996 and 21st-25th October 1996 (11 previous records; *Ornithos* 4: 158).
MALTA Second record: one ringed in November 1997.

Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*
CHANNEL ISLANDS Second record: Fort Saumarez, Guernsey, on 23rd August 1997 (first was on Guernsey in 1964).

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
LATVIA Vagrants of race *tristis*: two on 14th October 1997* and one on 20th October 1997*.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*
AUSTRIA First record: Vorarlberg on 5th-6th October 1994 (not 1st May to 6th October as given *Brit. Birds* 89: 263; *Egretta* 40: 29).
FRANCE Fifth record: Ouessant on 1st-3rd November 1996 (not 1st-8th November as given *Brit. Birds* 90: 248; *Ornithos* 4: 159).
POLAND Third record: male at Jastarnia, Hel Peninsula, on 21st September 1997 (previous records in September 1981 and September 1984).

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*
AUSTRIA Very poor season: only a single breeding pair in Lake Neusiedl area/ Burgenland in 1997 (species seems to be on verge of extinction in Austria).

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*
DENMARK First to fourth records: all of race *pallidirostris*, on 23rd October 1995 and

24th November 1995 (*DOFT* 91: 146), Præsto Fed, Zealand, on 19th October 1997* and Skagen, N-Jutland, on 19th-26th November 1997*.
POLAND First record of race *meridionalis*: Vistula River mouth on 18th October 1997.

Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*
DENMARK Invasion: 'some hundreds' during autumn 1997.

House Crow *Corvus splendens*
NETHERLANDS First breeding record: two long-staying adults with one young at Hoek van Holland, Zuid-Holland, since 17th August 1997.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*
CANARY ISLANDS Decline: population on Tenerife declining (apparently stable on other islands), with only 11-16 pairs in spring 1997 (cf. estimated 70-80 pairs in 1987).

Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus*
AUSTRIA Influx: four records involving 20-23 individuals in May-June 1995 (*Egretta* 40: 30).
HUNGARY Invasions and breeding: in 1994, 600 pairs in four colonies on Hortobágy and 40-50 pairs in Borsod-Mezőség region; in 1995, 1,600-1,700 pairs on Hortobágy (*Túzok* 2: 89-101).

Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla*
CYPRUS Correction: record on 23rd April 1997 (*Brit. Birds* 91: 54) was fourth, not seventh (earlier ones were on 22nd-26th April 1994, 6th March 1995 and 20th March 1995).

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*
ICELAND Vagrants: five during period 30th September to 11th October 1997*.
IRELAND Vagrants: four during 5th-24th October 1996 (*Irish Birds* 6: 86).

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*
ICELAND First record: porvaldsstaðir í Bakkafirði, N-Múl., on 23rd March 1997*.

Two-barred Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera*
DENMARK Invasion: more than 150 during autumn 1996.
HUNGARY Third record: adult male at Zalaegerszeg from 30th October to 13th November 1997.
LATVIA Invasion: total of about 100 at Pape, Liepāja, during 27th August to 5th November 1997*.
NETHERLANDS Unprecedented invasion: at least 83 individuals, including four flocks of 16-22, in Flevoland, Friesland, Gelderland and Noord-Holland from mid August 1997 to early January 1998*.

Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*
DENMARK Invasion: 'several hundreds' during autumn and winter 1997/98.

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*
CYPRUS Correction: record on 16th-21st April 1997 was first since that on 28th April 1988 (not since 1987 as stated *Brit. Birds* 91: 55).

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*
FRANCE Range expansion: first breeding in Haute-Savoie, with two singing males, and a female with three juveniles in Giffre Valley, in June 1997 (*Alauda* 65: 297-300).

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata*
NETHERLANDS First record: Vlieland on 13th-15th October 1996 (*Dutch Birding* 19: 225-230).

Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*
BULGARIA Second record: 27th December 1996 (*Neophron* 1997(2): 4).

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*
FRANCE Vagrant: 14th-15th March 1996 (*Ornithos* 4: 160).
IRELAND Second record: adult male at Swords, Co. Dublin, on 3rd-10th March 1996 (*Irish Birds* 6: 87).

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*
DENMARK Deletion: has been deleted from Danish List.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*
SWITZERLAND Decline: in Jura mountains, breeding population, estimated at 20 pairs in early 1980s, decreased markedly, and none observed in 1994-96 (*Orn. Beob.* 94: 353-358).

Yellow-throated Bunting *Emberiza elegans*
DENMARK Presumed escape: Stignæs on 18th October 1994 (*DOFT* 91: 147).

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*
AUSTRIA Second record: 16th November 1994 (*Egretta* 40: 31).
LATVIA Fourth record: Pape, Liepāja, on 12th October 1997*.

Chestnut Bunting *Emberiza rutila*
FRANCE Escape/vagrant: juvenile in Doubs on 5th-11th October 1995, placed in Category D (*Ornithos* 4: 161).

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*
DENMARK Fifth and sixth records: 12th June 1995 and 19th August 1996 (*DOFT* 91: 147).

Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*
FRANCE Second record: juvenile in Finistère on 17th August 1995 (not 15th-17th August as given *Brit. Birds* 89: 266; first was on Ouessant in October 1987; *Ornithos* 4: 160).

Official correspondents
ANDORRA Jacqueline Crozier; AUSTRIA Hans-Martin Berg; BELARUS Dr Michael E. Nikiforov; BELGIUM René-Marie Lafontaine; BULGARIA Dr Petar Iankov; CANARY ISLANDS Juan Antonio Lorenzo; CHANNEL ISLANDS Ian Buxton; CROATIA Jelena Kralj; CYPRUS A. E. Sadler; CZECH REPUBLIC Professor Karel Šťastný; DENMARK Brian Rasmussen; EGYPT Sherif Baha El Din & Mindy Baha El Din; ESTONIA Dr Vilju Lilleleht; FAROE ISLANDS Søren Sørensen; FINLAND Tom Lindroos; FRANCE Dr Philippe J. Dubois; GERMANY Peter H. Barthel; GIBRALTAR Charles E. Perez; GREAT BRITAIN John Marchant; GREECE George I. Handrinos; HUNGARY Dr Gábor Magyar; ICELAND Gunnlaugur Pétursson; IRELAND Paul Milne; ISRAEL Hadoram Shirihai; ITALY Marco Gustin; LATVIA Dr Jānis Baumanis; LITHUANIA Dr Petras Kurlavicius; LUXEMBOURG Tom Conzemius; MACEDONIA Branko Micevski; MALTA Joe Sultana; MONTENEGRO Dr Vojislav F. Vasić; MOROCCO Michel Thévenot; NETHERLANDS Arnoud B. van den Berg; NORWAY Runar Jåbekk; POLAND Dr Tadeusz Stawarczyk; PORTUGAL Dr João Carlos Farinha; SERBIA Dr Vojislav F. Vasić; SLOVAKIA Dr Alzbeta Darolová; SLOVENIA Iztok Geister; SPAIN Dr Eduardo de Juana; SWEDEN Tommy Tyrberg; SWITZERLAND Dr N. Zbinden; TUNISIA Thierry Gaultier; UKRAINE Dr Igor Gorbań.

REVIEWS

RSPB Birdfeeder Garden.

By Robert Burton.

Dorling Kindersley, London, 1998. 160 pages; 300 colour plates. ISBN 0-7513-0440-9. £14.99.

Being both keen gardener and birder, my shelves are laden with books—so what can this one offer me that is new? Well, it is certainly full of solid advice for the gardener; chapters on which plants to grow, garden construction and aftercare are all designed to provide both a haven for birds and an attractive garden. Chapters on providing nesting habitats and nestboxes, and on supplying food for birds, are the most useful. All in all, this book does not encourage anyone to be a lazy gardener.

In order to widen the readership market, the plant guide is split, to cover three geographical regions, ranging from northern Scandinavia and Russia to Mediterranean Europe, and all points in between. Many of the plants featured for one region would thrive equally well in another, but others would not, and this is not always made clear—confusing for the beginner.

Just 25 of the 160 pages are devoted solely to birds, totalling 66 species, but, like the plants, they represent a wide geographical spread, so we have Serin *Serinus serinus*, Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* and Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* described as potential garden visitors.

An attractive layout, typical of this publisher, will appeal greatly to the casual browser. It comfortably straddles my two favourite pastimes. *BARRY NIGHTINGALE*

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The EBCC Atlas of European Breeding Birds: their distribution and abundance.

Edited by Ward J. M. Hagemeijer & Michael J. Blair.

T. & A. D. Poyser, London, 1997. 903 pages; 495 line-drawings; 495 distribution maps. ISBN 0-85661-091-7. £55.00.

This atlas, justly claimed to be a monument to national and international co-operation, is the outcome of 25 years' work by what started as the European Ornithological Atlas Committee in 1973 and is now the European Bird Census Council. It aims to provide a view of both distribution and density, and also trends in range and populations of all the breeding birds of Europe from the Azores to the Urals. Conservation aspects are stressed throughout. It contains a remarkable input: 43 participating countries, perhaps a million hours of fieldwork undertaken by maybe 100,000 observers, mapping 495 species in over 4,400 grid squares, the species accounts written by 450 authors from 38 countries, and illustrated with vignettes by 27 artists.

The result is a handsome, data-packed and massive book, exceeding in bulk and weight the largest of the *BWP* volumes, and standing 4.5 cm higher. To get the most out of it, it is essential first to read carefully the seven-page Introduction, the importance of which has caused the editors to include it in 14 languages, collectively occupying 98 pages. The Introduction is confident in tone, stating that the work answers the question 'What bird breeds where?'. It hopes that the book will serve as a convincing reference base for conservationists wishing to monitor future population changes.

The species accounts occupy most of the book, typically two pages per species (one page mainly a map, the other mainly a text account). The texts touch on World distribution, seasonal effects, habitat, changes in range and numbers, and human impact. They have been contributed by several hundred authors, up to three of whom, from different countries, have combined to produce each text.

Good editing has ensured the success of this unusual approach; the breadth of perspective of such an international group has added much to the interest of these very instructive accounts.

The maps are, of course, the outstanding feature. The recording unit is a grid 'square' of (nominally) 50 km × 50 km. The grid does not appear on the maps, but each square within a species' breeding range is indicated by a coloured dot; the size of the dot indicates abundance, provided that the number of breeding pairs has been assessed for that particular square. Different colours are used if no numerical assessment was made or if breeding was uncertain. In contrast to these bright colours, a drab faint grey is used for dots denoting squares where no survey work was carried out. A useful colour key to map dots and diagrams is printed on the inside flap of the back of the dustjacket; *do not overlook or lose this, as it does not appear within the book itself.*

The grey dots dominate the eastern third of every map, and in Russia about 1,000 squares, covering more than half the country west of the Urals, have no records at all. Perhaps there was—or is—an opportunity here for some of our tour operators to give their clients the deeply satisfying experience of exploring for evidence of breeding, not only of exciting birds, but also of everyday species, in any one or more of dozens of squares south and west of Moscow, and of literally hundreds north and east of the vicinity of the capital—places where every tick would be an addition to EBCC's information. The difference between coverage here and the excellent response from most other countries throughout Europe is emphasised by the data-collection periods: 1963-94 in the case of Russia, but elsewhere mostly a three-year period and usually during 1985-88.

A few Russian observers have, however, reported on research work in remote corners, discovering, for example, that Iceland Gulls *Larus glaucoides* have probably recently bred in the northeast, and disqualifying Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi* from inclusion in the *Atlas* by doubting its present breeding occurrence in Europe, even in the Pechora valley. Thus, over most of Russia there is no indication of presence or distribution, even of widespread and common species, and this lack of information could give an impression of absence. To overcome this, buff shading corresponding to the Russian breeding distribution shown in *BWP* has been superimposed on the maps of all relevant species. This is very helpful to understanding

a species' range in northeast Europe, and one wonders why the buff treatment has been almost restricted to present-day Russia and not extended to the considerable unsurveyed areas elsewhere, including in particular the CIS countries of Ukraine and Belarus, and Albania.

I have been living, and birdwatching, in Surrey for many years, so my eye automatically fell on that area of the map when I began to examine and test the *Atlas*'s performance. It was fortunately possible to establish that one of the grid squares does indeed coincide closely with Surrey west of the 0° (Greenwich) meridian, but omitting its northernmost fringes and extending down into northern West Sussex. This square shows no Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, Rufous Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* or Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* as breeding in the area, and it rates Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*, Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*, Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*, Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, Barn Owl *Tyto alba*, Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*, Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*, Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* and Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* as no higher than possible breeding species. It also includes Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* as a possible breeder. Disregarding the eider, probably all these 19 species are regular Surrey breeders, some of them widespread (cf. the British breeding-bird atlases of 1968-72 and 1988-91); the correction and validation processes described in the EBCC Introduction evidently did not pick up these discrepancies. The variety of birds breeding in this square has been so substantially understated that if, in a few years' time, the number of species here should have fallen by, say, an alarming 10%, an accurate survey made then would not reveal a decrease when compared with this atlas, but would misleadingly suggest an increase.

There is also cause for worry about the assessments of abundance. Where it has been assessed, the number of pairs of each species in a square is shown in logarithmic scale by the size of the breeding distribution dot on the map. Glancing through the maps of passerines in the Surrey square, it is quickly evident that the size of the Surrey dot is usually smaller than the dot for the same species in most, and sometimes all, of the surrounding squares. The Surrey assessment lumps Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* (and most other Passerines) in the same abundance bracket as Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*, Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*, Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* and Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*. On this basis, it would be calculated that between 6% and 60% of Surrey's Stock Doves *Columba oenas* and Eurasian Jackdaws *Corvus monedula* nest in my garden, which is clearly nonsense.

If the Surrey square provides a fair indication of the quality of information in the *Atlas* as a whole, it suggests the need for a degree of caution in accepting the confident claims in the Introduction.

With discrepancies in distribution compared with undisputed contemporary national published material; doubts about some abundance assessments; absence of all such assessments for several countries; lack of coverage of any kind in large areas of eastern Europe; and obscurity about the sizes and positions of the grid squares, the *Atlas* may, sadly, not carry the complete conviction needed to make it the authoritative benchmark hoped for by its authors.

The existence of some debatable items is reasonably to be expected, and may not matter too much, in a work of this scale and coverage. If one wants close detail of significance at county level, one refers to the local tetrad map; for a national view, the *New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* (or its equivalent in many other countries) has the information; but for the best available attempt at a continent-wide perspective of distribution, together with many data on abundance, illustration of population strongholds, charts of trends in spread or decline, and discussion of factors causing changes, this *Atlas* is the book you need. Perhaps a more-complete and fault-free version may be produced in the future, but do not be put off from buying a copy now: it is as good as you can get, and will doubtless remain so for some years. If you come across any questionable or additional points, contact one of the editors. (They make no such request themselves, but their addresses are given at the start of the book.)

P. A. D. Hollom

Identification Guide to North American Birds. Part 1. Columbidae to Ploceidae: a compendium of information on identifying, ageing and sexing near-passerines and passerines in the hand.

By Peter Pyle with Steve N. G. Howell, David F. DeSante, Robert P. Yunick & Mary Gustafson. Illustrations by Steve N. G. Howell.

Slate Creek Press, Bolinas, California, 1997. Revised edn. 732 pages; 1,000 illustrations; 349 figs. ISBN 0-9618940-2-4. Paperback US$34.90.

This book is much more than a second edition of the *Identification Guide to North American Passerines* (1987) produced by the same team. At nearly three times the size of the original volume, it contains a huge amount of additional information and intelligently broadens the scope to include the 'near-passerines', the doves to woodpeckers in the traditional AOU list. It will be enormously useful both to banders/ringers and to enthusiastic field ornithologists. The remaining non-passerine species will be dealt with in part 2.

Anyone who purchased the 1987 book will want to buy this book, as will anyone who has an interest in the identification of North American birds. It is comprehensive, including all 395 species breeding to the north of the Mexican border, and it also consistently provides useful information on the 857 currently recognised subspecies.

The valuable 38-page introduction contains information on techniques of measurement and examination of birds, as well as well-thought-out directions for use of the book. The bulk of the text provides detailed morphological information. Bar-charts are used to indicate the seasons when ageing criteria can be applied, and the whole book encourages further investigation, especially the 32 pages of references.

Anyone interested in the more-recently described and tougher-to-identify species will find much of interest. Bicknell's Thrush *Catharus bicknelli* is treated well, as are the sharp-tailed sparrows *Ammodramus caudacutus/nelsoni*, the towhees *Pipilo erythrophthalmus/maculatus/crissalis/fuscus/aberti*, the plain titmice *Parus inornatus/ridgwayi*, the screech owls *Otus asio/kennicottii*, the solitary vireos *Vireo solitarius/cassinii/plumbeus*, the sapsuckers *Sphyrapicus varius/nuchalis/ruber* and the *Empidonax* flycatchers. The red crossbill *Loxia* section provides up-to-date treatment of this most complex group of taxa.

This is a thorough and scholarly work for which the authors deserve warm congratulations. *Stephen Rumsey*

The Birds of the Western Palearctic. Concise Edition. vol. 1 Non-passerines. vol. 2 Passerines.

Edited by D. W. Snow & C. M. Perrins.

Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998. 1,831 pages; 600 colour plates; 620 colour maps. ISBN 0-10-854099-X. £150.00.

The problem with publishing a multi-volume handbook is that it takes a long time. In the case of *BWP*, it took 17 years and, by the time the final volume appeared, the earlier ones were becoming well out of date, both in looks and in content. This new publication comprises two volumes, rather than nine, totalling over 1,800 pages. Remarkably, the number of colour plates has increased, and the new printing technology means that most of these are integrated into the relevant text, rather than being grouped into sets of four pages, often well away from the species involved. The typeface is marginally smaller than the original, but still clear and easy to read. Map technology has improved enormously over the period (compare the first British & Irish Breeding Bird Atlas with the latest European one), and this is where there is the most obvious change: the distribution maps are now clear and easy to follow.

What about the content? Well, inevitably a great deal has been left out. I (randomly) compared Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: over 20 pages are reduced to just two and a quarter, although (unusually) the plate is over 100 pages away, alongside Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*. Five pages of voice are reduced to nine lines. Gone are all those sonagrams (did any birder understand them anyway?). Population data, biometrics and behaviour are all massively reduced. We are left with brief notes on field characters,

habitat, distribution, food, breeding, and an almost useless few lines of weights and wing lengths—given as ranges, not means and standard deviations, and with no indication of sample size.

Many new birds are included, some because species have recently been found in the region, and others following splitting and reclassification. The 'splits' all have text and illustrations, which may be quite extensive, as with the regionally breeding Balearic *Puffinus mauretanicus* and Yelkouan (Levantine) Shearwaters *P. yelkouan,* and Eastern *Phylloscopus orientalis* and Western Bonelli's Warblers *P. bonelli* (a page and several illustrations each). Vagrant species merit only a few lines, but usually with an illustration (e.g. half a page each on Shy Albatross *Diomedea cauta* and Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus*).

This is a beautifully produced book, and at its price is reasonably good value for money. It is, nevertheless, very expensive, and, in many ways, has been reduced to little more than a fancy field-guide—though one that nobody would ever take into the field. I think that this is the attitude to take. No way is it a replacement for the original. But if you do not have *BWP* already, and want a lovely book with nice pictures of the region's birds, pretty maps, and competent sections on field characters—and you have £150 to spare—then it is worth buying. If the answer to any of these is 'no', or you want real detail, then put your money somewhere else.

Oxford University Press has also launched *BWP Update,* an extravagantly expensive series of slim volumes that is planned to update the real detail of *BWP.* This is still in its early days (I have seen only one issue—April 1997), but it is intended to fill the gap between the 'original' and the 'concise', by updating the detail of the former in the light of new knowledge. This is done very well: new sections where necessary, with referral back to the relevant parts of *BWP* where there is little or no change. The references are now given in full, and the maps are in the 'concise' format. For new species, there is an illustration and an extended text. Production quality is high (though I promised the Editor that I would not comment on the illustration on page 60).

I am unconvinced of the morality of this strategy. It smells of the publisher capturing an audience through an excellent handbook series, and then hitting them, not only with an expensive 'revision', but with an even more expensive 'journal' as well. OUP would have done a greater service to ornithology had it directed the updates to a widely available, existing publication rather than 'inventing' a new one just for that purpose (and I am enough of a critic of *British Birds* for readers to be assured that I am not being paid for saying this). *David T. Parkin*

Parrots: a guide to the parrots of the World. By Tony Juniper & Mike Parr. Illustrated by Kim Franklin, Robin Restall, Dan Powell, David Johnston & Carl D'Silva. (Pica Press, Mountfield, 1998. 584 pages. ISBN 1-873403-40-2. £35.00) Of the 352 species of parrot in the World, only two appear on the West Palearctic List: Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* and Monk Parakeet *Myiopsitta monachus*, both alien introductions. Many others occur, of course, as escapes from captivity, but this magnificent book will be purchased mostly by those who need a reliable identification guide when travelling to the other continents, where parrots occur naturally. Its two authors, working for BirdLife International, realised the need for a comprehensive, reliable guide, since many parrot species are endangered, not least by illegal international trade. *Pica Press* maintains its reputation for excellently illustrated guides with high-quality texts. *JTRS*

Attracting Birds to your Garden. By Stephen Moss & David Cottridge. (New Holland, London, 1998. 160 pages. ISBN 185368-569-0. £16.99) This nicely designed and attractive-looking book provides helpful advice to those who want to improve their gardens for the benefit of wildlife. More than half the book is, however, taken up by the 'Directory of Garden Birds', in which one page is devoted to each of 80 species, with a couple of colour photographs and short texts on identification, status and habitat (all of which will be redundant so far as *British Birds* readers are concerned). Of the 80 species, 66 have occurred in the garden of 'Fountains', and the 14 which have not include White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* and Serin *Serinus serinus*. Apart from this pandering to potential Continental purchasers (surely likely to be very small in number?), the species are well chosen. *JTRS*

DIARY DATES

Compiled by Sheila D. Cobban
This list covers July 1998 to January 1999

23rd July to 7th August SOCIETY OF WILDLIFE ARTISTS' ANNUAL EXHIBITION (including display of winning entries in 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' and 'The Richard Richardson Award' competitions). The Mall Galleries, The Mall, London SW1. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission £2.00 (free to SWLA members).

4th-11th August FIFTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON BIRDS OF PREY AND OWLS. Johannesburg, South Africa. Details from Robin Chancellor, 15b Bolton Gardens, London SW5 0AL.

12th-15th August INTERNATIONAL WADER STUDY GROUP SPECIAL CONFERENCE. Langebaan, South Africa. Details from Prof. L. Underhill, Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.

16th August BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION SOUTH AFRICAN OPEN MEETING. Durban. Details from Steve Dudley, BOU, c/o Natural History Museum, Akeman Street, Tring, Hertfordshire HP23 6AP; telephone 01842 750748; e-mail stevedudley@compuserve.com

16th-22nd August XXII INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS. Durban, South Africa. Details from Turners Conferences and Conventions (Pty) Ltd, 22IOC, PO Box 1935, Durban 4000, South Africa.

21st-23rd August BRITISH BIRDWATCHING FAIR. Egleton Nature Reserve, Rutland Water.

29th-30th August BIRDWATCHERS' WEEKEND. Castle Espie. Details from WWT, Castle Espie, Ballydrain Road, Comber, Co. Down, Northern Ireland BT23 6EA.

1st September YOUNG ORNITHOLOGIST OF THE YEAR: closing date for entries.

5th-6th September SCOTTISH WILDLIFE & COUNTRYSIDE FAIR. Vane Farm Nature Reserve, Loch Leven, Kinross. Details from SWCF98, c/o 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BN.

19th-20th September WORLD PHEASANT ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION. Edinburgh. Details from Nicola Chalmers-Watson, WPA, PO Box 5, Lower Basildon, Reading, Berkshire.

29th September to 3rd October PAN-MEDITERRANEAN SEABIRD SYMPOSIUM. 'Monitoring and conservation of seabirds, sea-mammals and sea-turtles of the Mediterranean and Black Seas.' Malta. Details from BirdLife-Malta, PO Box 498, Valletta CMR 01, Malta.

3rd October RSPB AGM. Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London. Details from Christine McDowell, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

17th-19th October INTERNATIONAL WADER GROUP CONFERENCE. Hungary. Details from Petra de Goeij, PO Box 59, NIOZ, 1790 AB Den Burg, The Netherlands.

30th October to 1st November SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB ANNUAL CONFERENCE. Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore. Details from SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

13th-15th November. SCOTTISH RINGERS' CONFERENCE. Five Farms Hotel, Braemar. Details from Bernard Zonfrillo, 28 Brodie Road, Glasgow G21 3SB.

21st-22nd November BIRD FAIR. Martin Mere. Details from The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Martin Mere, Burscough, Lancashire L40 0TA.

4th-6th December BRITISH TRUST FOR ORNITHOLOGY ANNUAL CONFERENCE & AGM. Swanwick. Details from BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU.

12th December ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB AGM. Zoological Society Meeting Rooms, Regent's Park, London. Details from OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

15th December THE BEST ANNUAL BIRD REPORT AWARDS: closing date for entries.

8th-10th January BTO RINGING AND MIGRATION CONFERENCE. Swanwick. Details from BTO.

31st January BIRD PHOTOGRAPH OF THE YEAR: closing date for entries.

Mrs S. D. Cobban, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ

NEWS AND COMMENT

Compiled by Bob Scott and Wendy Dickson
Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of 'British Birds'

Of records, Song Thrushes and the RSPB

We have recently returned from a week's travelling. A week that included a series of lectures, some squeezed-in birding and attending the RSPB's Members' Weekend. Now that we are back, those bird observations need to be submitted to the county recorders. A task that it is so easy to forget (and how guilty we all are at times). Every year, we are encouraged to submit our observations, but quite clearly many of us do not. That flock of 150 Corn Buntings *Miliaria calandra* on an Oxfordshire stubble field, the displaying Northern Goshawks *Accipiter gentilis* over the western oakwood, the flock of Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* on the Yorkshire reservoir, and the Coal Tit *Parus ater* with the characteristics of the Continental race *P. a. ater*, all need to be submitted. This is a message that bears continual repetition, as the number of observers regularly contributing to county reports is far below the number of active birders in this country.

A round-England trip, such as this, can leave some striking impressions that are difficult if not impossible to submit as records. The key impression on this occasion was just how numerous Song Thrushes *Turdus philomelos* are in the northwest of the country compared with the drastic reduction that has taken place in the southeast. It was great to see them in gardens and woodlands at virtually all localities.

Finally, the RSPB's annual gathering of members, this time at York. Some 700 members (plus approaching 1,000 YOC members on the Saturday afternoon) enjoyed a remarkably diverse weekend. We are always a little surprised that so few birders appear. There were some stunning presentations, with national and international themes that ranged from eastern Europe to Africa. Bill Oddie gave what must be one of the most entertaining presentations ever on the Saturday evening. This was also the occasion of Barbara Young's last Members' Weekend before her departure to English Nature (see page 260). Her eight years with the RSPB have produced some stunning successes that include dramatic advances in Government environmental policy. To this can be added RSPB reserves passing the 150 total and covering over 100,000 ha, and the membership total passing the one-million mark.

The next RSPB Members' Weekend will be at York on 9th-11th April 1999; full details from Events, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

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New Chairman of English Nature

Barbara Young (now Baroness Young of Old Scone), Chief Executive of the RSPB since 1991, has been appointed Chairman of English Nature—the first woman to head the Government's wildlife conservation agency. During her seven years as Chief Executive of the RSPB, the Society has expanded its conservation programme, increased membership to over one million, and had considerable influence on a range of Government policies which affect wildlife habitats. Conservationists across England can be reassured that EN has a leader who cares passionately about biodiversity and who knows clearly where the priorities lie. We sincerely wish her the very best in her new post. The RSPB is expected to announce the appointment of a new Chief Executive later in the summer.

The best-watched site in the UK?

There are places in Scilly, searched with a fine-tooth comb in autumn, where not a birder is to be seen at some times of year. Fair Isle and Portland, Dungeness and Bardsey get thoroughly covered in spring and autumn, but there will be days when even their wardens are not recording. The 10-km square containing Cley must surely be the most-watched square in the United Kingdom, but even that does not boast an annual 150-page bird report.

SK58 does.

Even bigger and better than before, when it twice scooped the small-membership accolade in the annual Best Bird Report of the Year competition, the 1996 report, summarising 8,500 records during 1996, on this 10-km square between Rotherham, Sheffield and Worksop has just thudded through our letterbox. 'SK58 Birders' had 35 members in 1996, and the report summarises observations by a total of 60 observers.

This is grass-roots ornithology, which we loudly applaud. More of this and there would not be the problems described in 'The death of ornithology' (*Brit. Birds* 91: 203).

For more details, contact Rob Hardcastle, Chairman, SK58 Birders, 1 Hunters Green, Throapham, Dinnington, Sheffield S25 2UF.

Anthony McGeehan at new RSPB reserve

The acquisition of a new nature reserve can be a slow, tortuous task, rarely appreciated by the visiting birder, who sees only the final outcome. A new RSPB reserve in Northern Ireland, on the shores of Belfast Lough in the heartland of the Belfast Harbour Estate, has 'enjoyed' a very prolonged gestation period, but has now gone public. The diversity of habitats which make up the reserve include shallow freshwater pools (a superb high-tide roost) and intertidal mud (important feeding for thousands of wading birds). Visitor facilities are in position, with screened view-points and a large observation room with panoramic views across the reserve.

The appointment of Anthony McGeehan as warden at the site will be warmly welcomed by the many birders who know him and his contributions to the birding scene over the years. This is where Anthony started his birdwatching. We can now expect some exciting observations from one of the UK's top field men. For more details of the reserve, contact Alison McCloy, RSPB Northern Ireland, Belvoir Park Forest, Belfast BT8 4QT.

Little Tern shelters

The most successful colony of Little Terns *Sterna albifrons* in the UK is at Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, where the RSPB has been involved in a protection and monitoring scheme since 1986. In 1997, the colony of 200 pairs represented about 10% of the UK population, with the 135 chicks representing 50% of the total UK fledged young. Over the years, the colony has enjoyed mixed success, with serious predation problems from Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* and Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* in some years. Contributing to the 1997 fledging success was the introduction of shelters for chicks, using plastic piping purchased for £100. One-foot (30-cm) lengths of piping were coated in glue and rolled in the sand, to provide camouflage, and then positioned within the breeding area. Many of the chicks used the pipe shelters for hiding between feeding visits by the adults.

Mark Thomas would like to see the scheme extended on a trial basis to other colonies, and can be contacted for details at the RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

Inland patchwork

It is impossible to get farther from the coast than Shustoke Reservoirs, North Warwickshire. King of this ultimate local patch is Brian L. Kington, whose own contribution to the records includes 95% of the Shustoke total of 166 species. A 32-page booklet, *Birds of Shustoke Reservoirs, North Warwickshire 1970-1997* by Brian L. Kington, has just been published. The site is described thus: 'with regular sailing throughout the year on three days a week, the steep and concrete-lined banks and the lack of bays make it an inhospitable, unpromising and artificial place in the eyes of ornithologists visiting for the first time. Only the enthusiastic, persistent and stubborn naturalist will keep plugging away . . .'.

How lucky we are that British ornithology includes such indomitable enthusiasts.

The booklet costs £2.95 from the author at 22 Burman Drive, Coleshill B46 3NB.

Manx Bird Atlas

An ambitious project during four breeding seasons and four winters, from April 1998 to March 2002, aims to map and count the birds of the Isle of Man on the very fine grid of 1 km × 1 km squares. The project is being supported financially by the Manx Government and local companies; additional offers of help, financial or with fieldwork, should be directed to Manx Bird Atlas, Greenbank, 33 Mines Road, Laxey, Isle of Man; phone 01624 851130; e-mail manxbirdatlas@enterprise.net

Seabird 2000

The Seabird Group, with support from the JNCC and the RSPB, is launching a new census of all of the seabirds breeding in Britain & Ireland. The main census will be in the years 1999 and 2000, with any gaps being filled in 2001, and publication planned for 2002. This successor to Operation Seafarer (1969-70) and the Seabird Colony Register (1985-87) will be called 'Seabird 2000'. Comparison of the last two sets of figures showed a 50% decrease in Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* and a 70% increase in Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*. What will Seabird 2000 reveal?

To offer your help, contact Mark Tasker or Kate Thompson, c/o JNCC, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle Place, Aberdeen AB10 1UZ; phone 01224 655701; fax 01224 621488; e-mail tasker_m@jncc.gov.uk

Polygynous Oystercatchers

The Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* is typically monogamous. Studies of the rare cases of polygyny, by Dik Heg and Rob van Treuren, have shown that the males do not benefit: if there are two nests, the male has to work hard to support each, whereas, if there is only one nest, the clutch is likely to be too large to be incubated satisfactorily. The benefit is the females'. Polygyny rarely occurred through the male extending his territory to include that of a widowed female (only 5% of cases). Usually, a trio was formed when two competing females failed to resolve their dispute, ceased fighting and either found two neighbouring territories which they defended co-operatively or started to preen close together, acted co-operatively and engaged in female-female copulations. These females benefited *subsequently*, by achieving a far higher success rate in finding a new mate than that of non-breeding females. All this, and much more, is described in full in 'Female-female co-operation in polygynous oystercatchers' (*Nature* 391: 687-691).

Marsh Harriers poisoned

We have just heard the results of the MAFF analysis of two dead juvenile Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* picked up at Lakenheath, Suffolk, on 7th August 1996. Both birds were poisoned by *Phorate*, a carrot-fly insecticide, which the birds had probably picked up in the food chain by eating worms or contaminated worm predators such as Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*. The chemical had not necessarily been used in an illegal manner, but we understand that MAFF is building up a dossier on *Phorate*, a chemical that is used on the carrots that we buy in the supermarkets.

Spotlight on MAO

BB stalwart, Dr Malcolm Ogilvie, was the subject of *Bird Watching*'s Birder Profile in the April 1998 issue. If you missed it, back issues cost £3 from Tower Publishing Services, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Lathkill Street, Market Harborough, Leicestershire LE16 9EF.

RECENT BBRC DECISIONS

ZEISS

This monthly listing of the most-recent decisions by the British Birds Rarities Committee is not intended to be comprehensive or in any way to replace the annual 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain'. The records listed are mostly those of the rarest species, or those of special interest for other reasons. All records refer to 1997 unless stated otherwise.

ACCEPTED: **Pied-billed Grebe** *Podilymbus podiceps* Ravensthorpe Reservoir (Northamptonshire), 26th April. **Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* Loe Pool (Cornwall), 19th October. **Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan* Gannel Estuary (Cornwall), 18th-20th November. **Herring Gull** *L. argentatus* of race *smithsonianus* St Mary's (Scilly), 18th December to at least 16th January 1998. **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* St Mary's, 29th-30th October. **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* Pitsford Reservoir (Northamptonshire), 15th-18th November 1996. **Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti* Hannafore (Cornwall), 3rd-12th December. **Dark-throated Thrush** *Turdus ruficollis* of race *atrogularis* Hollingwood (Derbyshire), 3rd January to 24th February. **Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi* Low Hauxley (Northumberland), 18th-23rd October. **Dusky Warbler** *P. fuscatus* Lannacombe Valley (Devon), 23rd October; St Mary's, 5th-6th November. **Western/Eastern Bonelli's Warbler** *P. bonelli/orientalis* St Mary's, 15th May. **Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* St Mary's, 7th-8th November. **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus* Boyton Marshes (Suffolk), 23rd November. **Southern Grey Shrike** *L. meridionalis* of race *pallidirostris* Long Buckby (Northamptonshire), 3rd-4th November.

M. J. Rogers, Secretary, BBRC, 2 Churchtown Cottages, Towednack, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3AZ

RECENT REPORTS

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan

This summary covers the period from 6th April to 10th May 1998. These are unchecked reports, not authenticated records.

Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* Great Mew Stone (Devon), 6th-8th April; North Uist (Western Isles), 12th-16th April; St Kilda (Western Isles), 22nd April. **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* Shannon Airport Lagoon (Co. Limerick), 23rd April. **Slender-billed Curlew** *Numenius tenuirostris* Reported from Druridge Pools (Northumberland), 4th-7th May. **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus* Shellness (Kent), at least 9th May to 10th May. **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularia* Eyebrook Reservoir (Leicestershire), 9th-10th May. **Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* Titchwell (Norfolk), 9th-10th May. **Franklin's Gull** *L. pipixcan* Titchwell, 10th May. **Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia* Papa Westray (Orkney), 16th April. **Little Swift** *Apus affinis* Boulby Cliffs (Cleveland), 10th May; Porthgwarra (Cornwall), 10th May. **Hermit Thrush** *Catharus guttatus* Fetlar (Shetland), 1st May. **Dark-throated Thrush** *Turdus ruficollis* Snettisham (Norfolk), 25th-28th April. **Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis* Long-stayer relocated at Waterside (Cumbria), 22nd April to 10th May. **Yellow-browed Bunting** *Emberiza chrysophrys* Hoy (Orkney), 4th-5th May.

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The post holder will be expected to respond to requests from staff within the Partnership, operate a current awareness service, manage the hard copy collection of books and journals and run a book review service. They would also be expected to monitor user requirements and change systems and practices to meet evolving needs. Computer literacy and confidence with databases and other electronic media is essential, as is a biological degree. A library qualification would be desirable. A keen interest in birds will be an advantage.

For a job description please contact: Rosina Abudulai, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK. Or via email: rosina.abudulai @birdlife.org.uk

Closing date for receipt of applications is Friday 26th June 1998. Interviews will be held on Friday 10th July 1998.

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British Birds

Volume 91 Number 6 June 1998

209 **Editorial**

210 **Breeding Marsh Harriers in the United Kingdom, 1983-95** *Dr John Underhill-Day*

218 **Looking back**

219 **Bird Photograph of the Year** *Dr J. T. R. Sharrock, Dr R. J. Chandler, Robin Chittenden, David Hosking and Don Smith*

224 **Monthly marathon**

225 **Spectacled Warbler in North Yorkshire: new to Britain and Ireland** *Craig C. Thomas, Richard E. Harbird and Peter J. Dunn*

Announcement

230 British Birds Investment Fund

Notes

231 Red-throated Diver feeding young in October *Alan S. Hart, David C. Jardine and Colin Jewitt*

231 Diving behaviour of Cory's Shearwater *Oscar J. Merne*

232 Little Bittern's reaction to attack by Great Reed Warbler *Ricard Gutiérrez*

233 Whooper Swan with white bill-base *Darren Hensley*

233 Red Kites 'playing' with newspaper *Juan José Ramos Encalado*

234 Moorhen preying on nests of Little Grebe and Common Coot *Mrs J. M. Thompson*

235 Feeding behaviour of Long-tailed Skua outside breeding season *Dr Markas A. T. Gilmartin and Mrs Caroline R. Gilmartin*

235 Sunning behaviour of Pied Wagtails *Dr Susan Fitzpatrick*

236 Mistle Thrush alighting on and taking off from water *Brian Marsh*

236 Juvenile Lesser Whitethroat eating cooking fat, peanuts and seeds *Brian L. Kington*

237 Juvenile Penduline Tit parasitising another nest *Francisco Valera, Herbert Hoi and Brigitte Schleicher*

238 Reaction of female House Sparrow to displaying male *Stephen L. Cooper*

240 Common Redpolls feeding on algae *Alan K. Dolphin*

241 **European news**

Reviews

253 'RSPB Birdfeeder Garden' by Robert Burton *Barry Nightingale*

254 'The EBCC Atlas of European Breeding Birds' edited by Ward J. M. Hagemeijer & Michael J. Blair *P. A. D. Hollom*

256 'Identification Guide to North American Birds. Part 1. Columbidae to Ploceidae' by Peter Pyle with Steve N. G. Howell, David F. DeSante, Robert P. Yunick & Mary Gustafson *Stephen Rumsey*

256 'The Birds of the Western Palearctic. Concise Edition. vol. 1 Non-passerines. vol. 2 Passerines' edited by D. W. Snow & C. M. Perrins *Prof. David T. Parkin*

257 Short reviews

258 **Diary dates** *Mrs S. D. Cobban*

259 **News and comment** *Bob Scott and Wendy Dickson*

262 **Recent BBRC decisions** *M. J. Rogers*

262 **Recent reports** *Barry Nightingale and Anthony McGeehan*

Line-drawings: 210 Marsh Harrier (*Norman Arlott*); 225 Spectacled Warbler (*Alan Harris*)

Front cover: Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* from the boathouse, June 1996 (*Paul Henery*): the original of this month's cover design, measuring 19.8 × 20.8 cm, is for sale in a postal auction (see page 66 for procedure).

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